# KSGU Volume 3

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These are the novel illustrations that were included in Volume 3

福井晴敏（ふくい・はるとし）

1968年、東京都墨田区生まれ。1998年に『Twelve Y.O.』で第44回江戸川乱歩賞を受賞し作家デビュー。『亡国のイージス』『終戦のローレライ』『Op.ローズダスト』など著書、映画化作品多数。現在、月刊ガンダムエース誌上にて本作『機動戦士ガンダムＵＣ』を連載中。

COVER DESIGN
akihito sumiyoshi + fake graphics

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スペースコロニー〈インダストリアル７〉を襲ったテロ事件から半日、
バナージとオードリーは地球連邦軍の戦艦《ネェル・アーガマ》に収容されていた。
両者に絡みつく『ラプラスの箱』を巡る様々な思惑。
その最中、「シャアの再来」と呼ばれる男、フル・フロンタルが赤いモビルスーツで強襲をかける。
通常の３倍のスピードで追い迫る敵を前に、《ユニコーンガンダム》に勝機はあるのか――。
ガンダム・サーガ最新作、白熱のシリーズ第３弾！

機動戦士
ガンダムUC ユニコーン
MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM UNICORN

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# 機動戦士ガンダムUC ユニコーン

## 3 赤い彗星

福井晴敏

キャラクターデザイン・挿絵 安彦良和　メカニックデザイン カトキハジメ　原案 矢立肇・富野由悠季

# Previous to GUNDAM UC
## 前巻までのあらすじ

人類が、増え過ぎた人口を宇宙へ移民させるようになって一世紀。宇宙移民者の独立を掲げるジオン公国と、地球連邦政府の戦争も終結して久しく、地球圏がつかの間の平穏の中にあった宇宙世紀0096。

工業コロニー〈インダストリアル7〉で起こった異変が、新たな戦乱の予感を押し拡げてゆく。開放されれば連邦政府が転覆すると言われる謎を秘め、強大な力をビスト財団に与えてきた『ラプラスの箱』。財団当主、カーディアス・ビストがその開放を企図したことから始まった暗闘は、地球連邦軍とネオ・ジオン残党軍の武力衝突に発展し、コロニーを戦火に巻き込んでいった。

ネオ・ジオンの重要人物、オードリー・バーンとの出会いから事件に巻き込まれたバナージ・リンクスは、カーディアスと対面し、彼こそが幼い時に別れた実の父であることを知る。『箱』開放の鍵となるモビルスーツ《ユニコーン》を託し、事切れるカーディアス。理不尽に人の命を奪う戦争への怒りが、バナージに《ユニコーン》の操縦桿を握らせた。

圧倒的なネオ・ジオンのモビルスーツを鎮めるべく、徒手空拳で戦いを挑むバナージ。危機に陥った時、《ユニコーン》は隠された力を発動させ、伝説の機体《ガンダム》へと変貌を遂げた。驚くべき機動力を見せる《ガンダム》の前にネオ・ジオンは撤退し、バナージは連邦軍の艦《ネェル・アーガマ》に収容される。その追跡を命じるネオ・ジオンの首魁、フル・フロンタル。まだ自分たちの運命を知らない人々を乗せ、艦はコロニーを離れた――。

(また敵となるか、〈ガンダム〉……!)
接触回線が開いたのか?　敵の声が明瞭に耳朶を打ち、バナージは考える間もなく「退がれよ!」と絶叫していた。(本文より)

# Chapter 1

## Part 1

("…Even though it's an initial estimation, I've already tabulated the accountable damages for you. We can use the work hazard insurance for those who died in the line of work, but it's harder to determine what to do with the people who died due to other causes.")

The face that was shown on the screen was of a woman's, a face that one could hardly believe was over 50 years old. The medium-long blond hair still retained its glow, and the cheeks that were slightly protruding never lost their elasticity. The background was of a dull color that was suited for business, and the lips with lipstick on even look bewitching.

Even so, it was not appropriate to describe this woman as young and lively. This 'woman' that appeared was not one a man would recognize as one—or rather, recognize as an ideal 'woman' despite her beauty. The reason behind this thinking was because of her eyes. In her wish to become treated as an upper-class lady, the probing eyes were giving off an icy cold magnetism. The greedy expression of the woman who was never satisfied with anything and only hoped to continue take in more was showing an evil tension.

("Considering how the media would react, it's more appropriate that we should offer some form of compensation to the victims. My husband will do something with regards to this as well.")

After saying that, Martha Vist Carbine remained silent, perhaps waiting for the other party to respond. The other displays were showing all sorts of information like 'insurance claims', 'medical fees' and 'survivor pension' as each individual estimated sum scrolled down the displays. The amount of the total fees required to revive the colony was enough to match the budget of a small country in the old centuries, but Martha's expression was rather calm as if she merely met a small car accident. Right below the numerous displays that were emulated in the air, "That's really well thought out." Syam Vist responded while looking similarly calm.

The body that laid down on the bed did not show any signs of moving, and the side of the emotionless face was basked under the light reflected off the displays. The Vist Foundation leader, who had been watching how the world changed ever since the start of the Universal Century and fought through many backdoor wars multiple times before making it till here, never changed his sharp expression even when he was lying down frailly on the bed. The presence he himself gave off never once faded. ("Someone will deal with this, so shut up. Is that what you mean?") The voice that continued were so cold it felt like they were piercing into his bones .

("This accident happened in a colony operated by Anaheim Electronics. No matter how we counter, it's impossible to prevent the stocks from falling, right? I know very well that my role is not to let the voices of blame reach the Foundation.")

Martha laughed away the leader's sarcastic remark, narrowed her eyes and showed a suspicious look. The display beside her showed the words 'A large-scale terrorist attack happened at Industrial 7', 'Is it done by the Neo Zeon guerillas?', 'The number of dead and missing people has already passed 600', 'The Federation space army has already issued warning to the forces guarding each side to remain alert' and all sorts of such messages continued to appear and disappear. Only the top half silhouette of the news broadcaster or the reference footages of Industrial 7 when it was being built could be seen on the display, and there were no footages of what happened there at all. As for the footages the residents there provided to the media—the Federation units using beam rifles inside the colony and crashing into the residential areas—they could not be seen about 30 minutes ago, whether it was the TV or the Net. Syam shows an expression as if he never saw anything in the first place to avoid Martha's doubt. "Cardeas did that. I don't know anything." He simply answered calmly.

("You managed to argue back first…") sighing, Martha could only show wrinkles as her lips give a bitter smile. ("I'm happier than anything to see you being so happy and lively, grandfather. I hope that I can go over to meet you in the near future.")

"You don't have to see such a sad old man like me who watched my son and grandson died earlier than me. Those who

are still involved in the current world affairs should have something else to do, right?"

("Please don't say that. We're siblings with the same blood, so of course I'm being emotional now that my older brother died. But since I've already wedded into the Carbine family, I can't just dwell in sadness. If any independent action by the Vist Foundation cause Anaheim to be dragged down, how can I possibly meet my husband and my father-in-law? Besides, I've already got the approval to take over brother's duties as the head of the Foundation…")

After saying that without practically no sincerity, Martha gives a smirk to the display. The matter of succession was not decided through hierarchy, but through the agreement of most of the family members, and there's something behind the expression. Anaheim Electronics was the family business of the Carbine family she married into, and while keeping this position, she use the muscle power that surpassed her husband to interfere with all sorts of affairs, playing a vital role in linking the Foundation and Anaheim in such a way that they were more than just partners. Syam's eyebrows could only twitch slightly as he see his granddaughter's shamelessness in not denying nor admitting that she was involved in this incident.

("It's the Vist Foundation's leader right to know the location of the cryo the boss is in and the view of the 'Box', and also a duty. Please take a nap before I go meet you, boss. ")

After leaving this message, the communication was cute off. The many displays shown in the air disappear, and darkness and

silence return back to the space that had nothing but a bed. Soon after, the panel installed on the wall of the dome increase in luminosity until the actual image of the universe was shown inside the room, and Syam's bed was already surrounded by the clear stars.

The cloud of stairs light up every single corner of the room as if the floor was scattered with silver powder, and the image of outer space showed all corners of the cryo the Foundation's boss was in. Gael Chan hid himself in the darkness where neither the earth nor the moon could be seen as he saw that bed that was floating there in a lonely manner, sighed and stepped forward. As he lies on the bed that acted as a cryo device, Syam mutters to him 'just laugh all you want' as the side of his face that had lost all its glory shows self-mocking wrinkles.

"This is the portrait of the Vist Foundation."

"I can't laugh at all. I didn't fulfill my responsibility in protecting my boss."

Syam turns his stare at Gael, who's standing about 3 meters away from him. It's been half a day since the sudden battle in Industrial 7 and when he learnt about Cardeas Vist's death. The Foundation's boss had been through a lifetime that's far too long for a human, watched too many of his relatives die, and now, it's impossible to see any sadness in him. He lost his most trusted successor, and watched the Foundation he single-handedly built up move on its own. Right now, he could not even let out a sigh—maybe this was Syam's current mood. If he could already realize that his own relative were all involved in such series of

plots and gradually becoming the next successor, how would he feel—

Gael himself wasn't as open-minded. He wasn't able to protect his master, Cardeas, and he did not even fulfill the duty of destroying the "Unicorn", the final order that was given. Even though he understood that all his paths of entry were already blocked by the Federation's special forces, the burning hangar deck and the passages being sealed weren't enough to be excuses. In fact, Cardeas himself dragged his heavily wounded body and managed to reach the "Unicorn" successfully before dying—he was devoured by the flames the moment he left the cockpit, and he was blown into bits the moment he was struck by the incoming shrapnel. The surveillance cameras at the hangar clearly caught the image.

The dire consequences happened in front of him was because of his own negligence. The bald head wrapped in the bandage sank as Gael clenched his burned fist. Just regretting alone can't change anything, and these are all the results of fate—if it were Cardeas, he would probably say such a thing. Gael had already lots this boss that would comfort him like this. That one and only client of his who could understand him heart to heart; that only man who was worth selling his life to, whether in the army or in the underground society.

"Since it's Cardeas, I suppose he has already prepared a failsafe such that even if he died, he can protect the secret tightly… someone like Martha will be forceful. She's different from the men who're concerned about their pride; she will not have any reservations when carrying out her plots. From the way she could

get the approval of the family as the substitute leader in such a short time, I think it's better to assume that it's only a matter of time before she finds this place."

"I'm a man. I won't just be protective of my own pride, I'll even swear allegiance for the sake of my own pride."

At that moment, Gael forgot about being tense in front of the boss. He lifts his face.

"So long as you permit, boss, I'll be willing to take revenge for Master Cardeas even if I have to sacrifice my life."

Martha Carbine was staying in the lunar city Von Braun that's under the protection of Anaheim Electronics. If the Foundation itself was just an organization meant to expand the family's earnings, then she'll be described as a really outstanding person who revived and expanded the authority of the Vist Foundation. She, who could even interfere with politics without a problem, detected Syam and Cardeas' plans for Laplace Box and got the Federation army to attack Industrial 7. Even though the battle that got intense was a result of unforeseen circumstances, the main reason for Cardeas' death was on Martha. In terms of underground talk, there's no one else other than her who 'settled the bill'.

Syam turns his head slightly at a way where one could not even detect, and his face that's half-buried in the pillow faces over here. Gael gives an unwavering expression as he gets this answer,

"Do you want me to command you to kill my own granddaughter now?"

It was a growl that was full of rage, causing the temperature within Gael to drop. Gael's stiffened by the other person's overwhelming presence before he could even reflect on his words, "…I'm really sorry" and lowers his head.

"Very good. Cardeas did get a very good subordinate. Since this is because of what Cardeas did, we can only believe that things will proceed in the positive direction; no matter whether it's the whereabouts of the Laplace Box or the future of Earth Celestial sphere."

Syam clasps his hands on the blanket and closes his eyes. Gael had nothing to say and could only bow and answer 'yes…', showing a professional expression as he lifts his head to look at the boss.

"About the Box, I've already investigated on the details involving the pilot of the "Unicorn"."

Gael reaches his hand to the floor and operates on the touch-type display that rose up from the floor silently. The holographic display again lights up the space above the bed, showing the photo of a boy's face.

"Banagher Links, 16 years old, a student studying at Anaheim Electronics. Registered from Side 1 area 3's 'Eden'. No special positive or negative data on him, and no records of him taking part

in political activities. I don't understand why he came to the " Magallanica", but he did meet the leader hours before the battle. As for what happened when both of them met, it's puzzling…"

Gael gives an overview of what happened yesterday, including the accidental meeting with 'her' . How Banagher, who was taken back to Industrial 7 once, managed to enter the "Magallanica" and ride on the "Unicorn", was a mystery to Gael. However, the pilot login data that was sent to the Command Module "Magallinca" matched Banagher Links information from the records in Industrial 7. The fact that he piloted the "Unicorn" and forced the "Sleeves'" mobile suits to retreat was without a doubt. Also, ther was the fact that he was taken in by a Federation ship—

"To be registered as the pilot of the "Unicorn", one has to gain the biometric authorization of the leader. In other words, Master Cardeas chose this boy as the pilot and died after that. I can only deduce that, so what happened that time…"

Due to its nature, the records of the "Unicorn's" pilot could not be easily erased after its logged it. There was a chance to destroy all the system, so Cardeas must had his reason for handing the " Unicorn" to the outsider Banagherr Links. Gael starts to stroke his chin as he looks at what seems to be a boyish instead of a youthful face, but was suddenly startled by a snicker.

Syam lets out the snicker as he watches the face of this boy that' s projected in space. His wrinkled face was smiling. Gael frowns in response, and Syam mutters, "I see. So you don't know." and turns to stare at Gael, who in turn inadvertently gulped his own saliva.

"Don't you understand? He's the new hope. Cardeas handed the "Unicorn" over to the most suitable person…"

Syam turns his eyes to look at the boy on the display and narrows his eyes as if he's afraid of light. The boss of the Foundation let out a kind grandfather's expression, and Gael could only blink hard bewilderedly.

## Part 2

On the display of the notepad-type PC, the designed English alphabets were shown. It was a simple logo formed as a combination of the letters U and C.

"The UC plan, the codename of the army reassembly plan that's affiliated to the Federation fleet, one that the company underwent under extreme security; the "Unicorn" was a machine that was developed as the flagship under the project of the same name."

In the dim room, the man with the frail-looking face said as the lamp shone on him. Aaron Terzieff was a 32 years old staff member of Anaheim Electronics and the person in charge of the armor material section in the development of the RX-0. As the battle broke out in Industrial 7, he tried to escape with the other workers from the Magallanica, but was detained by ECOAS as he was too slow. As most of the relevant data of the plan was wrecked, he was viewed as one of the people who knew most about the plans regarding the RX-0—

"Unlike the Mobile Suits of the past, this unit's biggest unit is that it's fully covered with Psycoframe all over the body. The

development base was the Anaheim Electronics' factory in Granada, and about one month ago, we have already finished both Test Unit 1 and 2 separately. Unit 2 was sent to Earth, and right now, it should be undergoing activation tests in the presence of gravity. I was in charge of Unit 1, and about 3 weeks ago, I was ordered by the company to send it to Industrial 7. The notification was an official document, and the superiors said that everything would be over if I only worked for another month…"

"Mr Aaron."

Daguza Mackle interrupted Aaron's pleading-like voice with an emotionless face as he said, "I'm sorry, but we're rather unaware of the technological side of things. Please describe the Psycommu, and get down to the details as much as possible."

"Yes…"

On the other side of the table, Aaron nodded his head in agreement "Yes…" and gives a look behind to ask for permission. Standing behind him, Lieutenant Garrett nodded his head. Aaron then starts to use his trembling fingers to operate the computer he brought along. Before this, Aaron had reached out for the computer without permission before and had his hand twisted behind his back by Garrett, so this should be just precaution on Aaron's side. Daguza senses that Lieutenant Commander Conroy was beside Garrett, shrugging and nudging his large body in the darkness, and deliberately leans forward to stare at the message on the screen. He used the cast-like left arm to slam the table and let out a shrill sound.

"Psycoframe. Basically put, it's a unique alloy that has a psycommu functions on it. The theory behind it is to shrink the computer chips to the minimum and level them together with metal particles on the frame."

The image shown on the display seemed to be an enlarged image of the psycommu under the microscope. If one stared at it closely, one could find what was obviously man-made chips lined in the gaps between the hive-shaped metal particles. That orderly yet mechanical construct felt more like a living cell than an object.

"As you know, the psycommu can receive and amplify the pilot 's brainwaves…or you can call it neural waves, and project the pilot's consciousness into the movements of the machine. The psycommu that's the main system is linked over to allow the psycoframe to receive the pilot's neural waves and also the pilot and machine's high-mobility coordination to happen. Due to the strength and production and all sorts of problems in the past, we could only install this system around the cockpit. However, the RX -0 in this plan uses psycoframe in all the mobile parts."

Then, the CG image of the RX-0 appeared on the screen, and above the moveable parts that formed the frame, there was a red light blinking. As it was just a simple introductory picture, it was impossible to see the details. Even though Aaron was one of the developers, he could only download this much data from his terminal. Daguza did not say anything as he merely prompted Aaron to continue.

"Due to the actual assignment of the full-set psycoframe, the pilot's neural waves can reach the machine's activation system. In

other words, the pilot does not need to 'control' the mobile suit as the word implies, and can control it basically through thoughts. Of course, all the joints are all magnet coated so in theory, the reaction speed of the RX-0 is unlimited. One can say that the machine's one with the body…no, it may be even faster. No matter how outstanding a pilot is, there will be a timing lag of milliseconds from the moment the pilot detects danger to the moment the pilot reacts. The RX-0 interface far exceeds the reaction speed of the human body."

"But in that case, the pilot's body shouldn't be able to react, right?"

If a metal giant that was more than 20m tall could immediately react to the pilot's brainwaves, one could imagine the outcome if it moved at a speed that far exceeds human reflexes. No matter how big the mobile suit was, a slight movement will create vibrations of several meters, and no matter how sturdy the machine itself was built, the pilot inside would be all dizzy. "That's right." Aaron himself agreed with this sentiment.

"In order to reduce the large G force that happens when the machine moves, the RX-0 has a Shock Absorber that specializes in reducing the impact, and there's also the pilot's suit. However, even with these equipment, an ordinary person can't endure the discomfort of piloting for a long time. Also, we have considered the stress the psycommu puts on the brain, and the maximum limit of continual operation is around 5 minutes. Thus, the limiter will be activated when the system is set in normal mode, and the NT-D device will only be activated in battle."

The horn on the forehead opened up to show a V-sign, and the shoulders, chest and leg armor slid. The psycommu frame hidden underneath appeared, and the thrusters and boosters of the machine that could be said to assure destructive power and mobility bared out. This was the real form of the RX-0—if this was really the case, the appearance of the so-called "Unicorn" would be some form of a limiter and fixed state. As he watches the CG of the RX-0 gradually changed its appearance, Daguza started to feel a chill inside his heart, and whispers, "What's NT-D?"

"NT-D is the name of the OS that operates the full psycoframe. I was only in charge of the exterior in the past, so I don't really know the specifics. However, I hear that NT-D is the shortened form of Newtype-Drive."

The unexpected term echoed in Daguza's ears as a ripple rose in his heart. After giving a meaningful look to Conroy, Daguza answered back to Aaron "I see" in a monotonous voice.

"After the RX-0 was moved to the Magallanica, it was once modified by someone. You should know clearly that the system wasn't involved in the initial design, right?"

A B5 sized photo was displayed on the table, and Aaron's expression obviously wavered. The army had taken close range shots on the interface panel in the cockpit when the RX-0 was taken back into the ship. In the photo, the terminal port showed a red symbol that showed "La+". "I'm only in charge of the armor outside, so any questions about the system is a little too…" Aaron answered, but Daguza did not show any wavering in his stare as he questioned,

"Mr Aaron, you better think through this before answering. The army does outsource assignments to civilian enterprises, but military use mobile suit developments are still part of the items in the Federation Technological Research Department that we have to report to the higher ups, and you may be deemed a suspect of taking up military resources, you know?"

"Why…!? I'm just…"

"Industrial 7 is a colony registered under Anaheim Electronics, but it's different for the Magallanica. In fact, the Vist Foundation can be said to be outside of legal means. After the final adjustments of the RX-0 's OS, it had a program that wasn't in the manual installed into it. I don't think you can simply pass this with a I don't know."

"I really don't! I only knew of the new program that was installed together with the NT-D after reading the updated specs design. There were rumors that the new program was provided by the Vist Foundation, but I don't know anything else other than this ! Even the activation conditions of the NT-D is an undisclosed classified secret to us who are in charge of hardware."

"Activation conditions?"

"The pilot can't just remove the RX-0's limiter at will. The NT-D will only activate when certain conditions are met. I only heard that the program installed on the Magallanica…the Laplace Program was a program meant to install a new condition on the NT-D. As long as the machine's controls aren't affected, we never questioned too much into such hardware stuff."

"But you should have taken part in the activation tests."

"The activation was still in simulation mode. The Laplace Program was only installed after the tests!"

Two hands slammed onto the table hard, and Aaron covered his head with his hands as he sprawled down on the table. Daguza used his eyes to stop Garrett, who wanted to pull him up, and stared at the shoulders that were trembling.

"Of course I felt that it was weird. For a manufactured military machine, there's too much classified information. Even since I reached the Magallanica, I was forbidden to make contact with outside, and I had to remain in full vigilance under the Foundation all day…the weirdest thing was that none of the workers had any relations to the army. However, ever since the war with Neo Zeon ended, the mobile suit productions had only been at the stage where slight modifications were made as we couldn't even try out new designs. During this time, even if we find it suspicious, the technicians would only close an eye and work on new technology that's being produced at such a time. Besides, the machine that was developed was that famous "Gundam"."

""Gundam"?"

Aaron's depressed eyes looked up as he answered, "That's our nickname for it", and gave a forsaken smile on his face.

"The moment we saw its NT-D activated…we could only treat it as if it was deliberately designed to be like that. That's what all the involved personnel called it, the "Unicorn Gundam"."

## Part 3

"Then, what should we do? Do we use the drugs on him?"

Five minutes later, Conroy asked as they stared at the monitor showing the camera footage of Aaron's face. Daguza drank the salted coffee, a Navy tradition, and asked back "What do you think?"

"It'll just be a waste of time for us to continue. He probably would not know any more even if we probe in more. The Vist Foundation's secretive measures were well played, giving each department only the information they're in charge of and not letting them deduce the entire thing."

Daguza did not disagree. Aaron, who was left in the monitor room, would either just touch the computer that was left in the room deliberately subconsciously or look down with a pale expression. It was not that they did not doubt that it was an act on his part, but his testimony were the same as the other developers. Besides, they were not professional interrogators. Daguza's feeling the same as well, and he didt want to use the confession drug without being confident and then the few remaining survivors into vegetables.

They would normally hand them over to headquarters to begin formal interrogations. Daguza put down the mug that had coffee in it and checked the numbers on the monitor <<11:17:32/04/08/0096>>. 8th April, 11.17 in the morning, about half a day after the battle cased, and it's been over 6 hours since the ""Nahel Argama" " left Industrial 7. Even though they were using the detention facilities inside the ship to question the 4 developers held inside the Magallanica, they got such messages that felt like they were blinded. After spending several hours listening to testimonies regarding the UC plan and trying to probe their relationship with Laplace Box, it felt like they were led by the blind as well. Daguza and the rest of ECOAS were feeling such futility.

"Let's leave aside the UC project for now. The reassembly plan of the space forces was already announced in the Mid-term defense <Mid-term Defense Contingency Plan>. I heard that they're to complete the unification of all the colonies that were scattered , and the earth orbital forces that are being built up to the level of the main fleets in the past is to hurry and prepare for the 100 year anniversary in UC 0100 4 years later."

The hulking Conroy rested his large body that dwarfed any wrestler on the wall of the monitor room, rubbing his eyes as he said so. The UC plan that was declared to have ended when the RX-0 was finished was planned as part of the space forces reassembly plan—all the members of the plan admitted. "I heard of it before. That's a plan that was mentioned when the military budget was being trimmed, right?" Garrett let the chair at the console turn around and said to them.

"That plan never had any intent of mass building new fleets. In other words, it's just a compression plan to gather all the forces. This is the first time I heard that they developed a new mobile suit. "

"It's not completely impossible. There's also the main show of the Republic of Zeon returning its self-independence back in UC 0100. They're gathering the forces at such a time, and there's the powerful new mobile suit…"

Daguza dragged his voice with half the mind to show how mystified he was, "Is this a PR activity on the military side?" Garrett frowned.

"I should say that the Federation government intends to show off. The reason why the main forces are stationed at colonies all over the place is to prevent the remnants of Zeon from rebelling. What should they do if they want to recall these fleets?"

"Ah…" Conroy's hint caused Garrett mug to remain in the air just as it was about to be brought to his lips. "So the Government intends to eliminate the remnants of Zeon before that? But—"

"It's not as easy as saying this goal. However, the Republic of Zeon's returning their self-independence over to us is a rare chance to get rid of the name of Zeon. The Federation Government intends to use 0100 as the deadline to wipe out all remnants of Zeon, use that to reassemble the Earth orbital forces, and after all those things, they can say that they finally ended the nightmare

since the One Year War. What will be need to pave the way will most likely be the UC plan, the plan to develop the “Gundam” to eliminate Neo Zeon.”

It was dangerous to predict and conclude with only a few reports, but if one thought of it this way, a lot of things could be understood. In this time where military arming was gradually reduced, the development of a mobile suit with new technology, the reason to search for the limits of the machine even if the people involved have to view the pilot’s life as secondary, and the fact that the appearance of this mobile suit was similar to the “Gundam ” Zeon so feared as the “White Devil”—

“Cardeas Vist hid a secret that can topple the Federation inside that machine and intended to hand it over to Neo Zeon…how ironic.””

If it really ended up like that, it would just be a slight commotion of sending salt to the enemy. Conroy and Garrett saw Daguza smiling bitterly, and looked at each other.

“Then, leader, is that mobile suit the Laplace Box?”

“Leaving aside whether we can put an end to this speculation, we do have enough proof here. We have a machine that was ready to be moved out with the spare parts and the Laplace Program that was only installed when it was moved to the Magallanica. I have no idea which level of the Vist Foundation got involved with this plan, but the Unicorn’s the symbol of the Foundation after all.”

The moment Daguza finished, the left arm and flank that were numb started to ache, and he did not continue . It seemed that the effect of the painkiller had worn out. Conroy seemed to detect this situation as he wanted to say something, but Daguza averted his stare and quickly said before Conroy could, "What we can understand is that the weapon was built for Newtypes to pilot."

"The Newtype Theory is the core of Zeon. Removing Zeonism is something that has to be linked with eliminating the remnants of Zeon. It's really puzzling why they would gamble on the Federation's trust in the plan and take a weapon meant for Newtypes."

"Fight fire with fire…you can think of it that way, but I heard that the Newtype research facility was already closed."

"No matter how we deny it, the conclusion is that we can't ignore how useful Newtype weapons are, is it? In fact, all the Gundam pilots up till now are…"

"It's because of this, that the elimination of Newtypes has to be carried out by non-Newtypes. This is to crush the myth that's ingrained deeply in people's hearts."

Conroy and Garrett immediately remained silent as the short silence descended on the narrow monitor room. Daguza darnk the coffee that went cold, and said,

"The UC plan, the Newtype NT-D Drive, the psycommuu…there might be other things we don't know of. It's the same with the

things seemingly related to Laplace Box. That "Gundam" really seem fishy."

*Getting right down to it, why did it suddenly move on its own?* Daguza suddenly recalled the appearance of the boy he found in the cockpit. *Now what's his name…* Daguza's mind is somewhat slowed by the use of the painkiller, and at this moment, he heard a voice that rang through the room's interal phone.

The members of ECOAS were in charge of this monitor room and the facilities used to detain the prisoners. Even the servicemen on this battleship were not permitted inside. "What is it?" Conroy picked up the receiver and gave a grumpy look. Daguza could read from his lips that Alberto called, and sighs as he walked towards the door. He unlocked the door to this room that could become an airlock in emergencies and pushed the metal door aside .

Alberto, who was standing right in front of the door, was nearly slammed by the metal door that was opened as he backs away in a jumpy manner. The gravity block inside the ship was not that much different from the moon, and quite some skill was required to control and move the body. The 'guest' from Anaheim was supported by his subordinates who were dressed in suits. He tried to steady himself, but this time, he nearly trips forward.

The man shook off the hands of the subordinates who wanted to support him again and forcefully steadied his feet on the floor of the passage. He tidied the collar that was buried under the collar's flesh and stared at Daguza. "What is it?" Daguza merely answered the expected antagonistic stare with an emotionless look.

"You're already asking me what's wrong? I've already sent someone to say that I'll be questioning the members of the plan who are detained. Besides, they're our company's staff…"

"Right now, they're important people managed under the military. We can't let civilians take part in the questioning."

"Then, I request to investigate the "Unicorn" that's inside this ship. That's our company's property, right? We have the right as it' s not handed over to the military yet."

"Of course. We'll be requesting your company for assistance. We'll contact you at that moment. Please leave for now."

The conversation between both of them was not any different from before. Alberto used ECOAS to get the initiative and searched the "Magallanica" for any information about the box. He, who showed an out-of-character attitude when the "Unicorn" appeared and demanded for it to be taken back, naturally did not feel happy about being lurched behind for these few hours. Alberto wanted to start arguing back immediately as he glanced at his subordinates who were dressed in suits. The fat and thick face twists mysteriously. Once Daguza detected that it was a smile, Alberto said without a care in the world, "Looks like we still lack a common understanding to this situation, Commander Daguza."

"What happened in Industrial 7 isn't something that can be covered up by chopping off the heads of to three conspirators. If there's anything wrong with the response, even Central Command can collapse. It's better for both sides to give some leeway to keep

the damage to the minimum. Regarding this, I suppose the Supreme Council Committee would have a similar agreement, isn't it?"

The man's expression and voice showed that he felt that if the superior's name was used, the soldier would shut up. Daguza took a deep breath and calmly answered, "It's true that it does seem that we lack a common understanding."

"To me, the damage was already done. Including my subordinates, several people, probably even hundreds have died. Even if we try to assist each other, they won't be revived."

Perhaps Daguza had some intent to restrain himself, but his eyes were showing some killing intent. Alberto, who was definitely overwhelmed by the mood, backed away and knocked his back into his subordinates who did not move. He glanced back at the stare he once tried to avert and seemingly muttered to himself, "…You're unexpectedly fragile for a soldier being the leader of ECOAS." In response, Daguza remained silent.

"Never mind. That's how it will be then. If there's difficulty in coming to an agreement, we'll let the topdown handle it. I'll report to the higher-ups as soon as possible and get the company HQ to mark the ECOAS headquarters in Luna Two."

"Do as you please. That's if the laser communicator can still work while we're hidden in the shoal space region."

Alberto's eyebrows twitched slightly. Daguza stared at his face and continued in a manner of fact, "Right now, the "Nahel

Argama" is still hidden in the remnants of Side 5. This place is the remains of the battle of Loum, but there's not many places to hide a ship. If the enemy intercepts our long-distanced contact, it'll be very hard for us to find another place to hide."

The "Nahel Argama" was not that reckless to solo through the space areas where the enemies might appear after having lost most of their forces. They could only remain in the remnants of the colony until the reinforcements arrived and seal off all contact to the outside. The current situation of the "Nahel Argama" was already anticipated by Daguza. If not, he would not talk to the official of Anaheim in such a direct tone.

The enraged Alberto looked like he realized what Daguza was thinking as he gave a defiant look,

"I'll talk to Captain Otto."

After glaring at Daguza, Alberto said as he turned around.

"He's a reasonable soldier."

After leaving these words behind, Alberto and his men, who gave dangerous looks walked down the passageway before leaving. The cylindrical gravity block was built with the inner wall arcing inwards, making a gradual slope. About more than 30m away from here, the other group disappeared at the edge of the ceiling, and Daguza waited for Alberto's large butt to disappear from his sights before sighing softly. He breathed hard to ease the pain that was gradually rising up his flank and asked Conroy, who was been watching the conversation from the door, "That boy just

now hasn't woken up yet?" "Yes." Conroy's thick eyebrows frowned.

"His body is a lot weaker than we thought."

"It can't be helped…he went through such acceleration just now . Once he wakes up, report to me. We have to hurry our investigations on the "Unicorn"."

"Yes. If possible, I really want to go back to Luna Two and carry out investigations without other people interfering!"

The small asteroid Juno, "Luna Two", was dragged over from the asteroid belt to obtain resources needed to build colonies. It was the Federation's largest base in space ever since it was steadied on the lunar orbit 50 years ago, and the special commands headquarters that was the base of ECOAS was also located there. There was no better place to investigate the RX-0 better than Luna Two, but the problem was that the Earth was right in the middle from there to where the ship was, as they're directly opposite from each other. Sighing, Daguza added on, "Tough one."

"Londo Bell's reinforcements are too slow. If the fleets that are stationed nearby are unwilling to move, it's likely that the Nahel Argama will reach the moon that's closer. Once we enter Anaheim' s headquarters, we'll lose the chance to investigate the "Unicorn"."

Though the moon did have a military command post, it was not as secure as ECOAS in terms of secrecy. Besides, if Anaheim lodged a complaint, the RX-0 will have to be left to the legislature, and it would definitely be moved away from the base. In this

situation, Anaheim's outstanding lawyers in the Earth Celestial Sphere would try to drag on the legal case and use this time to thoroughly investigate the RX-0. Once a conclusion was made, the machine that was returned to the military will be an empty shell, and all data related to the box will be wiped clean…this outcome was extremely obvious. No matter what anyone said, the moon itself was a world revolving around Anaheim Electronics.

Hiding in the shoal space region was their one and only chance. Even if Anaheim might talk later, they would have to do something before Anaheim does. "Understood". Conroy answered , showing that he understood the situation.

"So please get some sleep, commander."

Daguza heard these words that were quipped in at the end, and look like he was unprepared for this sudden attack as he glanced back at Conroy.

"When was the last time you slept? Around 30 hours ago, I believe? Nobody can replace you, so please treat your rest as part of the job."

The voice of the vice commander who had been with him for many years causes Daguza's tense feelings to ease somewhat. *That' s good.* Daguza watches Conroy leave these words as he left the monitor room, and leaned his body that felt extremely heavy onto the wall, maintaining this state as he closed his eyes for a while.

*I'm old now.* Daguza felt the bitterness that came with age in the chest of his almost-40 body that was starting to become useless.

## Part 4

*There's a piano sound. I know this—Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" mother liked.* The music that was quiet, sad yet maddening in a way that the heart would flutter, echoed throughout the high-ceiling and wide room. It felt like it was saying that his distant past could only look up from the Earth to the moon as it excited the human heart once before.

Looking up, the large tapestry hung on the wall filled his sights. The tapestry that reached all the way to the ceiling had flowers and animals woven on the scarlet red background of the cloth, and there was a woman in a sari dress standing in the middle of each tapestry. Playing the small piano, holding the flower garland, holding a sweet; in the six tapestries that decorated the room, the women were all focused on doing different things. Beside her, there was a lion with a thick mane and a unicorn with the horn on its forehead pointing to the sky—

*"Sight, hearing, touch, scent, taste. What these illustrations describe all the 5 senses that come with most living creatures when they were born , but as for this 6th one…what this 'tent' represents, there's still no conclusion."*

Banagher was carried up by the large hands of his father, and stared at the tapestry with the tent woven in the middle. The lady put the ornament into the box the servant girl beside her was holding, and intended to enter the tent. At the top of the tent, there

were the words in ancient language 'My only wish'. Banagher read these words in the way he was taught before, and his father smiled happily as he said, *"Amazing, you remembered."*

*But even father doesn't know what "My only wish" is about…*

*"It was drawn because that person didn't understand. And we think. Only humans are blessed with such ability. The unicorn that's woven on the tapestry and the music that's heard now show what that person felt through the human eyes and ears. That is a certain feeling the five senses can't comprehend, a certain feeling that transcends reality…maybe that might be called an existence called god, or maybe that's just an illusion created as a result of a human's wish. However, as long as we believe in that existence and do something for the world, that chance will become reality.*

*Do you understand? Banagher? Only humans have God. It's a great power to visualize their ideals and go close to their ideals…the god that exist within, called possibilities."*

*I don't understand completely, but I know father feels that he wants to teach me something important.* Banagher stared at his father's face.

*"That's the source of the power that allowed humans to rise up amongst countless animals and even land in space. It's true that humans devoured Earth until it was drained. They wasted their precious knowledge on killing each other, and the past wars have forced half of humanity to their deaths. Based on these, some people concluded that as a species, humans have reached their end. But I feel that's a pessimistic view, Past wars have shown the possibilities of Newtypes to people. Humans are the ones who can find hope in any given situation and use it*

*to overcome any situation. Knowledge and kindness, things that make humans what they are, come from possibility. Right now, the world's involved in the mess of despair and rebirth. You people who're to live on in the future must create a world where people can accept their deaths properly as humans. You must bring out the possibility within you and fulfill a world that can showcase the power and kindness of humanity."*

*"What you're saying it is too difficult…Banagher still doesn't understand."*

His mother said without stopping her hands from playing the piano. The face that showed itself from the grand piano seemed to be smiling. *"This kid is special."* After saying that, Banagher's father carried him up again as he smiled.

*"If you're willing to try, you'll be able to understand. This boy has the ability to listen to others. Even if he doesn't understand, he'll use his own way to try and feel what others intend to expression. This is an inherent gift. Once a person's 5, the nature will show itself like this. This isn't a talent that can be nurtured whether you want to or not. This kid's special."*

*Special.* This word brought about a chill into his chest. The room that was surrounded by soft light suddenly darkened. He could not see the tapestries, and his father's hands were not there to hold him. A red light came out from the darkness, and just when that light was about to disappear, many lights appeared all over the place, moving on their own. They looked like fireflies he saw on the TV, but they were much faster. These red lights would reach places Banagher could not see, and sometimes, some icy cold needle-like things would poke his body.

*Antagonistic intent*, this term appeared in his mind. As he hated this piercing feeling, Banagher desperately tried to note where the lights were. He wanted to teach these things really badly.

"Don't be fooled by what you can see or hear. Use your feelings. If it's you, you can do it."

Banagher heard his father. He closed his eyes and tried to feel that icy cold object. This was not too hard as these guys would give a sharp and painful presence before they attacked. *Just aim there and attack. There's no need to use your hands or your feet; just use your head to think.* Once he detected the presence, the belt that's tied on his head moved on its own as he thought of teaching those things a lesson. *See? Another one down.*

*However, the opponent would attack in response to my presence, so I can't show my emotions too much. I have to imagine that there's a pair of eyes staring outside, and I can see the entire battlefield completely. I have to read the flow of the enemy's presence and lure them into a corner—*

*"THAT'S ENOUGH!"*

The piano let out a distorted sound. His mother's face came out from the darkness as her hands were still on the piano. She was glaring at his father with a horrifying expression.

*"What are you intending to do to Banagher!? Aren't you treating him as some test subject!?"*

*"This is just a game. There's no drugs used at all."*

*"Of course not, right!? Of course you can't use such things! Newtype is just a term Zeon's promoting themselves with."*

*"But this kid has power, a power you and I don't have. This power can clear the curse that's bestowed on the Vist Foundation and show the world the future it should have…"*

*"Just let the kid who inherited the Vist family's name to do it. It has nothing to do with us."*

*"I intend to hand the Foundation over to Banagher in the future. If you wish, I can allow you to be registered under the Vist's family name…"*

*"THAT'S NOT WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT! I LIKE THE MAN CALLED CARDEAS VIST, AND IF POSSIBLE, I WANTED TO HAVE A KID WITH HIM—THAT WAS ALL! I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE FOUNDATION OR THE VIST FAMILY'S CURSE!"*

*There's no point talking any further.* His mother showed such an expression and sat behind the piano, not to be seen again. The light that vaguely showed revealed a piano no one was playing, and a faint light showed his father's silhouette outside the light. His father's face sank into darkness, and could hardly be seen.

*"…Those bestowed with power will create responsibility that comes with it. This is something I can't choose."*

*"So you're working on the order of the god of possibilities… I like the strong you who will back up his words, but I have no intent on offering Banagher as a sacrifice to god."*

His father wanted to say something, but did not as he faded into the darkness. Banagher was left in this silent and cold room, and he did not have time to feel uneasy or even cry before he was taken away by somebody else's arms. It was his mother's. To those eyes of the kid, the arms were large and warm. But at the same time, he felt that the arms were relying on him. *Yes, father's no long around. I have to be mother's support—*

*"Let's go, Banagher. This isn't the place for us to stay in. I hope that you become an adult who understands the importance of an ordinary life."*

After these words were spoken, Banagher suddenly felt difficulty in breathing. *But if this is mother's wish, I'll obey. It's best for me to forget this family and what father taught. That tapestry's the same too, and also everything about father. I'll hide them all deep within my memories.*

*I have to protect mother. Father said before that a man has to do this. I think remembering what father taught me has nothing to do with this…*

Banagher left the Vist family's house as he was dragged away by his mother's hands. The sculptures in the garden, the fountains and usually trimmed grass hedges all gradually faded away, and a world that Banagher had never seen before appeared in front of him. It was a world that focused on being 'ordinary', a world where he must not let himself be 'special'. He was likes an obstinate old man. He had to change, but he would not. Even if he had a wish to step forward, he would not move on his own. It felt like a gust of wind blew by, and like he was floating on the oceans,

showing an expression that he was not disappointed despite losing half his body in a major injury a few years ago.

*That kind of thing has its own fun. That's right, it's just as mother said. Being 'ordinary' will definitely have significance and greatness that comes from being 'ordinary'.* But Banagher felt the 'disjoined' feeling in there. For every step he took away from the house, the ' disjointed feeling' felt stronger. *Maybe I forgot something important?* He instinctively stops in his tracks and looks back at the house that seemed to have gone far, far away, and then continue on without thinking. At this moment, Banagher's ankle was grabbed as he immediately knelt down.

Looking back in shock, his father's hand was grabbing onto his ankle. The large and reliable hand of his father—was so icy cold it was scary. He had much more wrinkles, and he was as skinny as bones. The face looked aged, and his hair seemed to have all grayed. What was most shocking was that his father was covered with blood. Cardeas, who laid down on the floor, grabbed onto Banagher's ankle tightly, and the face that was like a dead man was staring at his own son.

*"Don't be afraid. Believe in yourself. Do what you feel you have to do. "*

Cardeas Vist said as his body was partly collapsed as it fused with the floor. Banagher only felt like escaping that hand's grip, but Cardeas just would not let go of his ankle. He originally intended to move further away as he held his mother's hand.

Banagher, who thought of shaking the leg that was grabbed and even stamp on him to get away, saw a giant that was standing in place of what was his house.

In that darkness, there was a darkness that was much deeper. The giant figure with the lone horn is staring down at Banagher. The term 'Unicorn' immediately appeared in his mind, and the giant's body suddenly expands as the surface that's cracked open reveals red light that looked like bleeding.

At the same time, the horn of the giant cracks in half as its eyes seems to shine like a demon. Banagher instinctively felt that he's about to be eaten as his body would not listen to him. The fear that rose within him form a voice that roared out from his throat—

## Part 5

The voice that came out from his throat was so hoarse it was surprising, and Banagher Links opened his eyes.

What first entered his eyes is the light panel that's giving off white light. The light panel had a wire fence on the surface. *It doesn 't look like furniture an ordinary house will have. It seems that I'm on a certain ship.* On thinking about this, Banagher's head started to move slowly. He remained lying down as he moves his sights.

There was a light antiseptic smell here. The fans seemed to be too loud for an air-conditioner. Most likely, it was the sound of the machines inside the ship making the sounds. From the way the sounds came about, this place was not a space shuttle or a working-class ship. *It's a larger ship—the sound of a large carrier-class ship's engine running.* As Banagher thought about that "Are you awake?" a voice came from beside him, and a man dressed in white appears in his sights.

One could tell from the slightly tan skinn that this man with some moustache was of Arabic descent. Baangher immediately tried to get up, but the man pushed him back onto the bed without

hesitation. The small torchlight shines right into Banagher's eyes, causing his face to frown. Fm, the man snorted and let go, and Banagher quietly leaned his back on the bed he was lying on.

He could see boxes with medication inside the room and 9 monitors on the wall. There was a treatment table beside the console, and there are documents of medical history. The wall beside the bed had small holes that are like mini tunnels, and they should be for something like CT scans. Banagher stared at his numb hands and notices that he was waiting a gown for patients. He tried to force out a hoarse voice, "May I know…this is?" The man in white continued to write something on the record and answered Banagher's doubt without looking at him.

"This is the infirmary of the Nahel Argama…can you understand it this way? Anyway, it's a Federation ship."

Tossing aside the medical record, the man picked up a canteen and returned to Banagher. Banagher immediately realized that he was in low gravity conditions from the way the water inside the canteen swayed. He received the canteen and seemingly gulped all the water down in one shot.

"I took your wallet to check. Your name's Banagher Links, a student of Anaheim Electronics Industrial College. Am I right?"

The man, who returned back to the treatment table, pulled out the chair and sat down before asking. "Yes." Banagher, who could finally make some sound after drinking, answered,

"As we were rushing out of the port, we didn't have the time to check the data of the colony, so I'll ask directly. Do you have any past medical history or any allergies to drugs?"

"I guess not…is this ship moving in space?"

"Yeah. We're still hidden inside the shoal space region. Don't worry, the enemy won't come looking for us so quickly."

From that nonchalant tone, he could tell that the man was already used to such a situation. *Enemies*; Banagher remembered this term that had nothing to do with him. Even though he could vaguely sense some danger, Banagher showed a relaxed expression and diverted his attention to the canteen that was already empty. He felt that the water was filling his originally parched body, melting away the weight that was built up within his heart. *Why am I so thirsty? How long have I been asleep?* He could not remember anything, and the brain that tried to recall was still not working. Even though he remembered he did have a very bad nightmare, it was just a vague feeling left, melting away gradually together with the weight inside.

*Perhaps this might be a dream as well. This is a dream I'm having in the AEIC dorm. Once I wake up, I'll have to be careful not to wake Takuya up and sneak out to work in the morning—speaking of which, I don't know what happened to the people of the Bubbo Company. The 4 winged mobile suit appeared in the Industrial zone. If there's a disaster at the port, the office that had some gasoline stench should be…*

Banagher's heart started to beat faster as his temples hurt. He used his hand to touch, and the feeling of the bandage reached his fingertips, causing him to gasp. Perhaps detecting Banagher's current situation, the man asked without looking over, "Does it hurt?" "A little…" Banagher answers. "That's proof that you're still alive. Try and endure it." What he got was such cold words. " The latch that's used to fasten the helmet forced itself on the forehead. Without that, you would have died with your neck snapped."

His heart started to race again, and this time, the sound is so loud that other could hear it. The latch was used to fasten the helmet—that machine that looked like it had an interrogation set attached to the headrest. His head was once held by that thing on both left and right side before pressing onto his forehead. The scene in the past immediately became a bright visual, and the thin layer that covered his memories was ripped apart.

The siren could not stop, and the monitor displayed the words " NT-D". His body was then held down with such force that it felt like his eyeballs were about to explode from the acceleration. Finally, everything was soaked in a very viscous liquid, causing everything in front of his eyes to look like they're in slow-motion *…what happened after that?*

The canteen dropped out from Banagher's hand and onto the floor, letting out a clear sound. *That's right, I was once sitting inside that cockpit, piloting that mobile suit called the "Unicorn" and fighting against the "enemy". Audrey, Cardeas, Takuya, Micott;* several faces and names appeared in his mind. Banagher used his hand to

support his head that felt like exploding soon. The automatic door opened, and a woman's voice could be heard "Excuse me!" before she entered.

"Doctor Hassan, I heard that the kid's awake…" Speaking halfway through, the woman's eyes met Banagher, who lifts his head. "Ah, it's true." The woman's round eyes became even rounder. The Easterner's petite body had a grey shirt and white pants on her. Though one could tell from her attire that it was the Federation Space Forces, the woman herself did not look like a soldier. Once Banagher felt that she was basically a girl around his age, the man called Dr Hassan turned around and said with a flat tone, "Oh, you're here alone."

"The person himself did indicate that the identity's correct. I've already done the checks you wanted as well. What I investigated using the facilities here show that he's all clean."

Hassan showed a meaningful expression as he concluded and said this to the woman. The woman looked back at his expression and nodded. The grim atmosphere that came with the term check reached Banagher's heart, but he did not have the mind to think too much into it. "Nice to meet you. I'm Ensign Mihiro Oiwakken. " She lifted her expression that seemed to be hidden before and greeted with a smile, causing Banagher to blink.

"Welcome to the Nahel Argama…the current situation doesn't make it situation to say this, but are you alright? Banagher Links?"

"Ehh, well…"

"There's a lot of things I would like to ask you, but first, I have to thank you. It's thanks to you piloting the gundam that we're able to survive."

""Gundam"?"

"The machine you piloted. Am I right? The face was hidden thought, and there's only one horn left."

*I don't understand at all. I don't even understand what she's asking.* Banagher turned towards Hassan, who was facing the desk as the white back did not look like it was going to turn around. "Don't you remember?" Mihiro's head tilted slightly to the side as she glanced at Banagher's eyes.

"I remember sitting in the mobile suit and piloting it. But at that time, my mind was just thinking about making it move…"

Suddenly, a pulsating pain came out from his temples. It was not the pain from the restraint, but a pain from the inside—"Is this kid alright?" Mihiro turned away from Banagher, who was touching his bandages, as she asked Hassan.

"I still have to do some more important things that will be of burden to him!"

"There's a slight concussion, so he might feel dizzy. His body doesn't have any problems. He's fine, for a "Gundam" pilot."

Hassan answered with his face tilted aside. Banagher's confused mind responded to the term "Gundam pilot" as he and Mihiro turned to look at the side of Hassan's face.

"This isn't the first time. Every time, the "Gundam"…never mind, you'll soon understand."

Hassan waved his hand to divert both their stares away and turned back to the table. Banagher and Mihiro stared at the white profile, glancing at each other from time to time, and an awkward silence soon happened. "Don't worry too much." Mihiro forced a smile and said,

"We've checked your identity, so just answer the military's questions later."

"But the doctor just said that he didn't have time to check with the colony's records…"

Banagher saw that Mihiro was taken aback, and regretted somewhat that he just said something unnecessary. Those who knew about such things would have the other party on the ropes—especially in such a place like the army. Perhaps begrudging Hassan for saying too much, Mihiro glared at his back and sighed, gave a wry smile as she admitted to Banagher, "Your friend identified you." Sensing that Mihiro seemed to be a gentle person, Banagher relaxed somewhat. On the other hand, the term friend causes Banagher to frown.

"Those people look like they're from AEIC, so I was wondering if they knew you. Asking asking, they said that they went to the colony builder with you when escaping and separated in the meantime."

"Takuya and Micott? They're on this ship too?"

Banagher really couldn't make any other conclusions. "Do you want to meet them?" On hearing Mihiro follow up with these words, "Of course…!" Banagher answered enthusiastically. Mihiro looks at Hassan and gave him a look of dilemma. Hassan did notturn back as he merely said, "I didn't hear anything." Mihiro then shrugged her slender shoulders, lowered her head to stare at Banagher, and said, "Alright."

"Just a little though. There'll be a lot of high-ranking uncles coming over to ask you questions. Understand?"

Mihiro gave a stiff smile, which somehow indicated the seriousness of this situation. Realizing that he was in a troublesome situation, Banagher cautiously got off the bed and stepped on the floor barefooted for the first time. It felt eerily cold.

## Part 6

'Banagher. Banagher.'

The moment the door opened, the basketball-sized ball leapt over. "Haro!" Banagher answered as he hurriedly caught that thing.

Haro flapped its ear-like round discs as it remained in Banagher 's clutches, asking in a synthesized voice, 'Are you alright? Are you alright?' "Of course." Banagher answered as he turned Haro upside down to check. Even though there's a bit of soot, the surface that was covered by a layer of rubber did not show any signs of scars. After scarring in a relieved manner, "Banagher!" " You're still alive!" The familiar voices entered Banagher's ears, and he frantically looked around the room that was 10m wide.

At a corner of the recreational room for officers, which had vending machines, plants and several simple tables and chairs, Banagher found the owners of the voices. Standing up from the sofa and looking over with a blank expression was Micott Bartsch. Takuya ignored the NCO who looked like he was in charge of watching over them as he dashed over. As he saw their faces, Banagher could not hold back the emotions swelling in him as he answered, "I thought you guys were…!" the words remained in his throat as he stamped the floor and caught Takuya who was flying over.

Micott then caught up to them and hugged them. The trio were all bundled up and floating in the air due to inertia. Mihiro stands beside them and stops the NCO who was trying to stop them, giving a wry look. Banagher uses his body to embrace the warmth of his friends. This warmth, this is reality—even if the 'disjointed feeling', he would not feel shaken. This was the warmth that showed that he belonged to this world. The skin that was tense due to the cold was warmed up, and Banagher enjoyed the comfort that came with the hugs. *This is where I should be in.* His heart was filled with such thoughts. *I'm not going to ride on the*

*mobile suit again; I'm not going to get involved with the Vist Foundation and Neo Zeon. The day I got involved in nightmares has ended…*

It had been about a mere 2, 3 seconds in the air. The moment they slammed into the wall, the trio was grabbed by the gravity they once left as they collapsed onto the sofa "It hurts!" "Gyah!" All sorts of cries could be heard. And then, it was unknown who started laughing first as the room is then filled with the trio's laughter. Takuya and Micott only had some light scratches on their legs and arms, and it looked like they did not get injuries that were too severe. Both of them look a lot livelier than the last time they met, and it seemed that they bathed and washed off the sweat and dirt on them. After looking at both of them, Banagher repeated it again, "It's great to know that you two are fine…" "Of course not." Takuya clenched his fist loosely and jabbed it into Banagher's stomach, grumbling unhappily,

"We had it rough. We were shaken about by the mobile suit's hand, moving all around the battlefield. I really don't know what you were doing that time."

"I was really worried about you, seriously. I heard that you were kept in the ship with us, Banagher, but they wouldn't let us see you. Is the injury on your head fine? They said that you never regained consciousness…"

Micott wanted to touch the bandage on Banagher's head, but was blocked by his hand. As Banagher wants to tell her that it was not too serious, a light Banagher saw before came from opposite the table, behind Mihiro and the NCO, causing him to gasp.

Emerald eyes. The eyes that declared that everything had changed. The eyes that were gleaming intensely were in the same room as her. That person was starting at him while looking like she was hiding behind the NCO. Immediately, Banaagher was not looking at other people as he stands up from the sofa.

"Audrey!"

Her shoulders jerk, and the emerald eyes widen slightly. Banagher did not care as he steps on the floor, and as he was about to fall, he passes by Mihiro and the NCO.

That's right. It was Audrey Burne. The chestnut-colored hair, clear white skin and long legs with jeans on were the same as yesterday. He feels a burning sensation climbing out from deep within him—it was not warmth, but something much stronger. The heat caused Banagher's body to become anxious and made him move to those emerald eyes. For some reason, the first words Banagher said were "I didn't expect you to be kept in this ship too …!" On hearing this, Audrey diverted her gaze to the floor.

"Ehh…things ended up like this."

Looking over, Audrey turned her stare behind Banagher's shoulders. Banagher realized that Audrey was staring at Takuya and Micott, the heat inside him subsides.

*The two of them know Audrey. They know that Audrey, who looks like she's part of the anti-Federation forces, snuck into Industrial 7 yesterday, met the Vist Foundation—and definitely has something to do with the battle last night.* Banagher, not anybody else, was the only one who

told them these. As Banagher thought about this, it was too late by the time he took a step back from Audrey. “So you’re the Audrey Banagher mentioned before.” The stinging words came from behind, causing Banagher to turn around.

The one who spoke was Micott. The bone-chilling stare passed by Banagher as it landed on Audrey alone. Banagher noticed at Micott was staring over at him with a suspicious stare at well and got in front of Audrey.

“Who are you? Why did you come over to Industrial 7?”

Perhaps Micott was wary of the NCO’s stare as she never asked Audrey so directly. Mihiro interrupted Micott, who let out stinging words after being unrestrained, saying, “Oh my, don’t the four of you know each other?” Banagher clenched his sweating fists tight as such a situation developed right in front of the one person he did not want knowing what was going on—the Federation officer. As Banagher could not think of any words to break the deadlock, he subconsciously raised his arms to protect Audrey…“She just moved into Industrial 7 yesterday” another voice rang inside the room.

“She’s Banagher’s childhood friend, and she’s supposed to transfer over to our school, right?”

Takuya gave a look, but Banagher could not catch up for that moment as he vaguely answered, “Eh? Ahh…”

"Hm? Is that so?" Mihiro asked. Before Micott could show a doubtful look, Takuya patted her on the back and said, "You're worrying too much, Mihiro."

"Even if there's a friend who suddenly came by for an hour, Banagher won't probably look at any girl other than you, right?"

Even Banagher was dumbstruck by these words as his mouth was gaped open. Mihiro let out an understanding expression as she nodded away, while MIcott, who was left behind, immediately went red. *You said too much! What if she gets angry!?* Banagher was worried as he could not help but close his eyes. "What are you saying!? What I mean is…!" Micott's enraged voice rang, and just when the helpless Banagher had to endure this—

"Is Banagher Links around?"

A sharp voice suddenly interrupted them. Banagher looked over at where the voice came from, and he saw two men walking through the door of the recreation room.

One of the men was tall and burly, had short hair, and had a physique of a wrestler, and the other was a man with sharp attention and ferocity all over him. Both of them were also wearing Federation uniform, but the presence they gave off was obviously different from the other passengers. If the other soldiers were wooden sticks, these two were metal bats. The man with the sharp expression alone may even be described as being like a sharp knife .

Banagher met that knife in the eyes, and as Mihiro and the NCO remained still, those two walked over without much thought. Even with a cast on one of the men's left arm, the footsteps were not showing any signs of faltering. The sharp stare scanned Banagher from the head to the fingernails, and the body that resembles a giant cat species arrived in front of Banagher. Banagher tried his best not to look away as he stared straight at the man's face. The man's stare remained still, asking without any emotion on his face, "Is this the boy?"

"Yes, Commander Daguza." Mihiro answered. The man looks away from Banagher and immediately questions Mihiro, "I did say before to immediately bring him to me once he's awake, right?"

"I was the one who let him meet the refugees who were detained. That's because I heard that they were school mates."

Mihiro gave a bold expression that did not match her babyface as she never looks at the men. Her attitude shows that she had some contempt for the men. However, the man called Daguza did not seem to mind as he looks down at Banagher, telling him "You, follow me" before turning away. The tone that did not allow for any objection caused Banagher to step forward before he could even think.

"Wait a second…! You're saying that you're taking him? To where?"

"Banagher's like us! He managed to escape to this ship!"

Takuya and Micott then added in, causing Banagher to stop immediately. Daguza turned back and glanced at them, and said with an unwavering tone, "That's for us to decide."

"Aren't you being too bossy here!? Besides, when are you going to send us back to Industrial 7!?"

"The ship's in a precarious situation. I can't make any guarantees."

"My father Fabio Bartsch is the factory owner of Industrial 7's Third Workzone. If you're only going to take Banagher away, please state the reason first."

Micott knew that most adults will change their attitude after hearing these words, but this time, the outcome was not what she desired as Daguza stared at Micott and said solemnly,

"He piloted a military mobile suit as a civilian and entered the battlefield. This heavy crime alone is enough to warrant capital punishment."

"Military mobile suit…?" "You're the one who piloted it?" Takuya and Micott let out their shocked voices respectively. Banagher saw that Mihiro seems to be begrudging Daguza for saying too much as she glared at the side of his face. His eyes started to move around. "Banagher, don't tell me you…" A soft voice came from behind, causing Banagher to be so shocked his eyebrows twitch.

Audrey, who instinctively reached her hand out for Banagher's shoulder before taking it back immediately, was showing signs of faltering in her expression. Banagher recalls that everything changed the moment he saw these eyes. *Me, Audrey, and maybe even including Takuya and Micott may have taken on a path of no return.* Banagher harbored such a thought that might be instinctive and answers, "I'll tell you later."

"Wait here for me, alright?"

*Don't tell anyone else.* Banagher said this to Audrey with his eyes . Audrey backs away, showing a silent stare at Banagher. Banagher felt the warmth that spread when his shoulder was touched, and followed Daguza out of the recreation room. Mihiro looks like she was saying "Don't worry", and the hand that was patted on Banagher's shoulder gave him strength to walk forward with his head held high.

## Part 7

The high pitched siren rang inside the helmets through the wireless communicator. This summoning siren for the Marines sounded exceptionally pitiful here as it brought about a lonely presence, ringing through Riddhe Marcenas' ears.

Soon after, a rumbling could be felt under his feet, and the large catapult gate was closed. The gates that closed in from top and bottom sealed off the catapult that was 20m on all sides, hiding the large catapult that was floating upright in the vacuum. During this time, before the hatch closed completely, Riddhe and the rest were lined up in front of the catapult, raising their hands to salute. The

catapult hatch for landing was still open as they awaited the machines that had not returned…but no matter how much they waited, the people who did not come back would never come back . It had been more than half a day since the battle people would record as 'Battle Of Industrial 7' in the future happened, and the Nahel Argama was headed to a new situation. Riddhe and the rest remembered the people who passed away, and had to take their next steps forward. The souls of the pilots who died in this battle should had returned home—

<So everyone wasn't able to make it…>

Lieutenant Commander Norm Basililock muttered as the thick gates closed up and the warning lights flashed, indicating that pressure was moving in. He once requested the superiors to keep the gate open even after 12 hours, and after the 17th hour, the mobile suit squadron leader whose attitude softened might still be able to see the remains of his subordinates floating in the vacuum. Riddhe turned to look at Norm, but he could not see the expression on Norm's face as it was covered by the visor. Riddhe could not say anything as he could only mix around the troops after the squadron was dismissed, and went down one airlock after another inside the ship.

Riddhe removed his helmet and hung it on the hook behind him, walking down the mobile suit deck that already had air. He sees that most of the mobile suits were not back inside the hangar as the silent metal wall just remained there, feeling thoroughly dejected. There were 5 "ReZELs" that were definitely destroyed, and 3 "Jegans" as well. ECOAS also lost what looked like a tank, and the remaining one was lying in a corner of the hangar under a

canvas. There were 3 confirmed survivors, and one of them had only minor injuries while the other two were lying inside the ship' s intensive care room for treatment, so there's no hope of them return back to the front lines. The mobile suit deck that had already lost 2-thirds of their fighting strength had a relaxed presence of air inside. The sounds of cranes moving and welding caused the melancholy of lights fading to be even more acute.

"Deborah, Nazal, and even Commander Ian…that's quite the heavy loss."

"Leaving aside the R003 Romeo that was ambushed, the other 7 units were all taken down by the same machine, right? And we let that guy get away."

"That's two-thirds, two-thirds! How are we going to regroup with so many units taken down? Even if we count in the spare " Jegan", there's only 5 mobile suits we can use! We can't even form a squad!"

"We can only wait for reinforcements. In this situation, we can't even hang on with that four-winged of the Sleeves attack again."

"I still haven't massacred that J4 Juliet ReZEL guy who beat me in poker…"

As there was no loud chatter like usual, the conversation between the mechanics became extremely shrill. Riddhe subconsciously clenched his fists and floated by the mechanical frames that were lined up in such a way that it looked like they were tombstones. *Stop blaming us all the time*, Riddhe grumbled

deep inside his heart. *It's not that the cowards survived or the brave soldiers died. What separates these people is just luck. When the death god swings its large scythe, a slight difference of whether we're standing or sitting will decide the outcome. In this situation, no matter whether it' s experience, ability or courage, none of them have any help.*

Death just came by so simply, causing the people who survived to feel lost. Though Riddhe had thoughts of taking revenge for his allies, that sort of feeling was like taking a gamble. Maybe it was just an instinct, the only way for him to feel at ease. To Riddhe, things like hatred for the enemy and regret had become really alien to him. To put it directly, he lamented not being able to feel regret. Riddhe felt angry over being so inexperienced that he doesn't know what to do with his body that was still alive. *Sooner or later, I might have to use the memories of the people who have died as part of dishes—*

As he thought unhappily, the voices of the people were further away. Before he realized it, Riddhe was already right in front of his own machine that was being maintained. The machine itself was covered in soot, and the NAR-008 that was spray painted on it had become unidentifiable, but the machine itself was not significantly damaged anywhere. Riddhe looked up at the "ReZEL" that did not have any signs of a graze from the beam rifle and realized that he did not do anything. He took the cable gun and pulled himself to the cockpit. Several cables extended out from the opened cockpit, making it hard to identify the back of Mechanical Officer Jonas Gibney who was working inside.

The tall and burly body was bent as he was holding the keyboard that was attached to the display board. The back profile

looked like it was crying, and Riddhe gasped slightly. The old timer NCOs had completely different views from rookies who were assigned here like him, and they seemed to have a passion-like will when being on this ship. They just went through an official battle for the first time since being on active duty again, and this battle took many lives too. Having experienced this again, Gibney might had been hurt more than anyone else. Riddhe ws unable to think of what to say as he let out a call, “Mechanic officer …” and that thick body turn around with a glare of killing intent right on him.

“DAMN YOU! YOU EVEN DARED TO BRING SUCH A TOY ONTO THE BATTLEFIELD!?”

His savage face looked a lot more heinous than usual as he tossed the hand-sized plane model right at him—that was the model Riddhe brought into the cockpit before the battle and forgot that it was inside— “Ah, no, that is…”the voice that was let out was stuck inside the throat, and Riddhe backed his body as he floated back. “WHAT IS THAT!?” Gibney continued to glare at him as he moved out, and the large body was standing right in front of the cockpit’s hatch.

“It’s because you took this thing out with the attitude of going to a picnic that we got massacred by the Zeon remnants!”

Gibney opened his legs and forcefully stepped on the cockpit hatch, kicking Riddhe out. Riddhe could not do anything as he floated around in zero gravity, his back crashing into the hock-shaped armor that was extended out from the “ReZEL”s crotch. The surrounding mechanics were all shocked as they

looked at both of them, only to show a 'here we go again' look as they turned back. Riddhe quickly stood up, glared at Gibney and yelled, "YOU'RE JUST USING THIS AS AN EXCUSE TO VENT YOUR FRUSTRATIONS OUT!"

"I FOUGHT HARD ON THE BATTLE AS WELL! DON'T VENT YOUR FRUSTRATION ON ME!"

"IT'S POINTLESS IF YOU DON'T SHOW ANYTHING! JUST TAKE THIS AWAY AND PLAY!"

Gibeny threw over the plane model and snorted. Riddhe did not look at his face as he merely stared at the little biplane flying over his head before kicking the armor beside his feet instinctively.

Riddhe felt that it was stupid to think about this, yet he also thought that it was less depressing this way as he feels motivated out of a sudden as he started to chase the plane that was moving through the deck in a dreamlike-state. Perhaps it was because the original design was suitable for aerodynamics as the biplane model's wings easily passed through the air, flying to the wall on the opposite side without slowing down. The biplane moved through the narrow spaces between the cranes, reached the narrow catwalk at the wall, and flew into the crowd working on it.

A person moving through dodged it and used his hand to grab the biplane that suddenly flew over. Riddhe was a step slower in reaching the handrail of the catwalk, and was surprised by the side of the face of the person who was not wearing the uniform. He was wearing deep blue jumper and jeans, and had slightly long ash-brown hair. His face was smaller than the man who was

walking in front of him by a size, and one could possibly call him a teenager—

"Ah, sorry."

"No…that was nicely done."

The boy handed over the biplane he caught as his mouth relaxed, staring over at Riddhe. Those eyes had no hidden intent in them, but they were rather strong-willed. There was a sharp glint in his eyes, one that did not match his obedient looking appearance. Riddhe stared at those eyes that were giving off some mysterious pulling force, and was confused by some form of fluttering in his heart, but looked up once he noticed the other stares around him. Commander Daguza Mackle, who was walking in front, glanced over at Riddhe without any expression.

Riddhe immediately saluted and moved away from them. The boy's face was soon blocked by the adults as he walked into a place that could not be seen. *If he were a refugee that's being moved… it's overly cautious to surround a boy with a gang of people. What's most suspicious is that even the Manhunters are amongst them.* Riddhe watched the group of around 10 people walk by, and finally found a familiar face at the end. He moved over to that person, arookie who was assigned to the security force at the same time Riddhe was assigned here.

The security troop had a sling on his usual secondary uniform, and his head had a anti-round helmet with a white line drawn on it. Riddhe went over to greet him, and brought his face closer to whisper, "Who is that guy?" he pointed at the boy with his chin, and the peer answered softly, "The brat who piloted the 'gundam' just now."

"It's him…!? He's still a kid."

"Didn't I say it before? I heard that they're going to carry out tests on him later."

*The gundam-type mobile suit who forced the 'Sleeves' four-winged to retreat with its overwhelming power and this boy walking in front of him who looks like a kid;* Riddhe never thought of linking these two thought as he can only remain still. During this time, the group of people had already walked all the way to the front, and the peer kicked the floor hard to catch up. Riddhe followed suit and moveed beside the peer.

"What now?"

"Aren't you going to the "Gundam"? I heard it even got a solid shield and rifle. I want to look too…"

"No no, outsiders are not allowed. The guys from Anaheim and the Manhunters are already arguing loudly over the rights, so it's already boiling point here."

"They're the outsiders."

"It's pointless to tell me that now."

*Move on move on.* Riddhe was chased away by his peer as he could only stop unwillingly. The group got on the lift at the end of the catwalk, and the peer who followed in at the end was in charge of closing the lift. For an instant, Riddhe's eyes meet the boy's eyes , but he did not have the time to check his impression on the boy.

The door that was closed cut off the boy's stare as the lift moved to the lower deck.

Below the mobile suit deck, there was a mechanic deck that was also called the factory inside the ship. This was a place that was used when a machine needed a change of parts or that there needs to be a large-scale repair. The Gundam-type mobile suit that was taken in was kept inside here—or to put it correctly, if it was the same as when it was taken in, it should be the one-horned mobile suit that did not look like a "Gundam". The enraged Riddhe kicked the elevator door and used the recoil to bounce back, grabbing the airlock that was installed inside the ship. *Everyone looks really tense now, so can't you understand other people's feelings now?* Riddhe grumbled some meaningless rants about others in his mind and left the mobile suit deck.

## Part 8

Since the standby order was already issued, Riddhe could not go back to his own room to relax. He hid the biplane model inside his helmet and walked towards the pilot waiting room.

At this point, the standby unit and mechanics were all mobilized, and the Nahel Argama couldn't maintain its original formation. Riddhe could only stay in the empty waiting room together with the members who survived as he put on the normal suit and moved through the dull space in front of him. He looked rather irritated as he moved around while holding the lift-grip. Once he arrived in front of a cross-junction, a familiar profile move right in front of Riddhe, causing his heart to beat faster.

Chestnut-colored hair, clear white slender face, and the purple cape that was puffed with air inside; that's right. Riddhe quickly adjusted the speed of the lift-grip as he called out, "Wait, you're…! " He let go of the lift-grip right in front of the cross junction and kicked the wall at the end to eliminate inertia. The girl showed a surprised look on her face as Riddhe turned 90 degrees to look at her.

"So it's you. Are you hurt? I was worried just now, but I didn't have time to ask…"

The girl with the floating cape stopped at where she was as she stares at Riddhe. The emerald eyes show a form of willfulness…or rather, it might be appropriate to call it tension. Riddhe himself tensed up as he saw the beautiful side of the girl's face and eyes through the monitor when the Magallanica was in utter chaos. *It's because I saw this face that I could respond without fear.* As he made such a baseless belief, Riddhe politely smiles and said, "Ah, I was wearing this helmet just now, so you might not be able to identify me."

"I was the mobile suit pilot who brought you guys here."

*Ahh.* The girl looked like she was trying to recall. "I'm Riddhe Marcenas. What about you?" he continued. "…Audrey Burne." The girl let out the voice from her lips. Her emerald eyes looked down to the floor, and the slender prideful face had lost some of its luster. The carefree look from before was gone as the girl let out an awkward presence while she looked away, causing Riddhe to be unable to comprehend. *Maybe she's an unexpectedly shy girl?* He wondered. As he harboured such a thought was completely wrong

, Riddhe looked down at the side of this girl's face again, and immediately, "AREN'T YOU TREATING HIM AS A CRIMINAL!? " another voice rang throughout the passage.

At the end of the passage, right at the entrance of the door leading to the machine adjustment room, Riddhe saw a black-haired girl with her eyebrows curling up. "You must be mistaken about Banagher piloting the "Gundam"." and then, the one who spoke up next was an Easterner boy who looked to be of the same age as the girl. They were both staring at the female officer in front of them. If she was not wearing a uniform, she would most likely be mistaken for being of the same age as them with the baby-like face of hers. It was Mihiro Oiwakken.

"But it's a fact that he sat in the cockpit. Is there any other reason why the "Gundam" could move?"

Mihiro was not aware of Riddhe's group standing on the other end of the corridor as she looked really flustered while trying to comfort them. He felt somewhat surprised the moment he heard the term "Gundam" in such an unexpected place, and said to the girl, "Erm, they brought along with you too, right?" the girl who called herself Audrey looks up and simply nodded.

"You know that brat…that "Gundam" pilot?"

"Yeah…"

*What's going on?* Riddhe vaguely answers 'Fuun', recalls the appearance of the boy that was taken away by the Manhunters, and immediately tninks of an idea. He curls his lips up, smiles and

whispers to Audrey, if you're so worried, do you want to see him? "

"Eh?" Audrey lifted her face. As she gave him a weird stare, Riddhe turned his back on her and walks towards Mihiro. *This might be able to clear the vagueness inside. Besides, it's a pilot's job to remain motivated when on standby. If nobody's going to comfort me, I'm going to do it myself.* Riddhe spent less than a second fooling himself completely as he stared at Mihiro and company, and raised his index finger in a way resembling old-Eastern children playing,

"Those who want to see the "Gundam", please gather here—"

## Part 9

The monitor panel seam let out a green light, forming a layer of laser in the air as it scanned the body. The display board showed the mapping data of the capillaries until the <IDENTIFIED> word appeared on it, and the activation sound of the main engine rang throughout the cockpit.

The monitor panel started to run, and the all-view monitor appeared in front of the linear seat. At this moment, it showed the vision of the eyes of the 20m tall giant. It's the enclosed space surrounded by the walls. The mechanic deck that was not even half the size of the mobile suit deck had two sets of mechanic hangars for minor repairs. One of the hangar sets had a Jegan unit with the armor removed, and facing it on the opposite side was the

"Unicorn", surrounded by many people under zero gravity. This mobile suit had unique specs, had the cockpit at the abdomen, and had a lone horn pointing out at the top.

Commander Daguza was standing on the other side of the opened cockpit door, and behind him was the guard with his hand on a pistol at his waist, getting ready and showing no signs of relaxing at all. The sounds of the shutters start to echo, and Banagher just felt that it was unbearable to be inside. He lowered his head and hoped for everything to end here. The reason why he did not want to remain so long in such a place was because this place still had the bloody smell of that person—

"That really shocked me. We couldn't activate it no matter what we did just now!"

The mechanic who poked his head into the cockpit, watching the inside of the cockpit said. There were many people of different affiliations taking part in the live examination of the "Unicorn"; people dressed in army uniforms and people dressed in suits. Those dressed in uniforms could even be divided into two groups; the members of this ship and the strong men Daguza was leading—seeing how muscular his arms were, this mechanic should be Daguza's man. Banagher peered at the head of this mechanic who was inspecting the display board, and was about to ask whether he could leave "Don't you know that this mobile suit can only be activated through biometric inspection?" On hearing the unfriendly words, Banagher lifted his head.

The one who spoke was the leader of the people in suits, and it seemed that his name was called Alberto. That fat body was

floating in the air, looking over Daguza's shoulder and staring at the machine. The mild colored-styled suit looked very similar to the suit Cardeas used to wear. However, Alberto did not have the mark of the unicorn on it, and he looked to be rather hot as the collar was all messed up while under the blob of flesh on the chin. Banagher thought that it was a special suit designed for the Vist Foundation, but perhaps that might be the latest trend or something?

The mechanic gave an annoyed look. Alberto simply looked away, pretending not to see, "That sort of thing can be removed immediately once we send it back to Anaheim." he said. "It looks hard." This line interrupted Alberto's snort. "What!?" Alberto glared at the subordinate standing on the "Unicorn" head.

"This is already programmed deep into the OS. If we randomly reformat it, we might end up deleting that Laplace Program at all."

The subordinate answered without even paying attention to the situation, causing a speechless Alberto's face to look like a compressed meatball. As he stared at that face, Banagher had a feeling that they met before. However, this feeling merely lasted until Daguza entered the cockpit.

"You entered the cockpit to look for a spacesuit. Cardeas Vist then appeared in front of you and registered you as the pilot of the "Unicorn". That's how it went, am I right?"

Daguza bent over as he brought his face near the seat, giving a sharp look. "Yes." Banagher answered him with a stiff voice.

"You've never met Cardeas Vist before this, right?"

"…Yes."

"It's only the first time you met. How did you know he's Cardeas?"

"I just said it already. I saw his photo on the AEIC introduction or something pamphlet."

Banagher lifted his head and answered as he stared right at the other person's eyes, whose stern stare caused Banagher to look away. *Pull yourself through.* He clenched his sweaty hands as he told himself this. *I can't say the truth that easily. I still haven't understood the situation yet. If I say anything random, Audrey will be deemed suspicious as well. He's a military man, and a man with such sharp knife-like stare, but it's not like I can't hide anything from him. Besides, I have something advantageous to me.*

Even Banagher himself could not accept the truth that just felt surreal to him. *Lying about this should be useful.* Banagher kept quiet and turned his face to the front. Daguza sighed "Your words are really hard to accept." He said as he looked away.

"He left everything to a person he met for the first time…and to a boy like you to boot."

*Will you accept this if I say that Cardeas' my father?* Banagher muttered deep inside his heart. *Will you not admit this even in such a*

*case?* As he mocked himself for this, Banagher felt a chill from the words he heard next, “That man has always been a weirdo.” Alberto said this as he stood beside the cockpit.

“If that wasn’t the case, there wouldn’t be so much controversy, right?” he continued, and glanced into the room. Ever since they first met, Alberto would shoot looks of heinous ill intent at Banagher whenever he had the chance, and this time, it was already on the verge of hatred. That hatred was now all over Banagher, causing him to unwittingly swallow his saliva.

“One-man show. Tyrannical. He said that he was doing it for the sake of the Foundation, yet it was just for his own satisfaction. It’s really nice enough to call him a rogue. Simply put, he’s just a man so lonely that he couldn’t trust others. He probably want to create one more hassle for us by handing the “Unicorn” to this boy , or he lost his sanity on the brink on death…”

“He was still sane at that time! He clearly told me to use this to protect everyone!”

Banagher stared at the side of Alberto’s face, realizing that Alberto had finished speaking and that he was the one who spoke up. Alberto looked stunned while Daguza turned his sharp stare over. Thinking that this was bad, Banagher could not restrain the hot sensation rising from his throat to his nostrils, and he simply said out what was left of what he wanted to say,

“That’s not something that somebody who doesn’t trusts others will say. Such words were only said because he has no one around him whom he could trust, right?”

*Why am I arguing about this? What am I angry about?* Just as Banagher himself did not seem to understand what was going on, Alberto, whose expression immediately changed drastically, reached for the cockpit cover and let his hand reach in from outside. He grabbed Banagher's chest and showed a menacing look, saying, "Saying it like you understand really well, huh!?" even though he was right in his sights, Banagher gritted his teeth and never looked away.

"You're saying this because you know what sort of situation you're in now, right? In certain situations, even kids will have to go to jail."

"Of course I don't know…! I only know common sense like ' talking behind other people's backs when they're dead isn't right'. You're an adult, and you don't even feel embarrassed by this?"

Alberto gasped, and his nostrils expanded as the hand that was on his chest showed signs of tightening. Banagher grited his teeth, and at this moment, "Stop it." Daguza roared and quickly reached his hand out to grab Alberto's wrist, which Banagher saw,

"You're being too carried away here. You too, Banagher. Those aren't words a child should be saying."

Daguza said as he simply twisted the wrists to restrain Alberto completely. Banagher swallowed the retort he was about to say and turned around. "I GOT IT! JUST LET GO OF ME!" Alberto roared at Daguza as he left the cockpit while looking like he was flying forward.

"It's a waste of time to do this. The "Unicorn" will be sent over to Anaheim on the moon for investigations. Before that, seal it, SEAL IT ALL!"

"This is a Federation's ship. You don't have the authority to order…"

"I can get it if there's a need. I'll go to the Prime Minister or the Chief Senator to give the order. Oi! Don't randomly take photos there!"

Alberto rubbed the wrist that was just twisted and lashed out at the mechanic who was about to take photos with his camera. At this moment, his foot that was on the cockpit cover slid off. Alberto frantically tried to reach the cockpit cover with his hands, and missed as his body slipped towards the mechanic deck in a confused manner. Nobody was at the area he was falling to; only a "Jegan" frame with exposed moveable frames. *If he accidentally crashes into there, he might be electrocuted.* Realizing this, Banagher immediately grabbed onto the control stick.

With the sound of the actuators being activated, the "Unicorn" slowly raises its right arm. "Oi!?" "It moved!" Banagher ignored the people creating the ruckus as he used the mechanical arm of the "Unicorn" to grab onto Alberto. He gently gripped onto the control stick that moved with the fingers, and the "Unicorn"s palm easily grab onto Alberto who was floating due to the recoil. Everything should be fine as he had checked that there was no one around the arm's movement rang.

Everyone turn their backs on the giant hand holding onto Alberto and divert their stares into the cockpit. Banagher brought his hand away from the control stick and tried not to look at any of their faces. “Did you do that?” Daguza asked while standing beside him, and Banagher did not look back at him as he said “Yes. ”

“That’s not easy. It’s impossible for me to imagine that you piloted a mobile suit for the first time.”

“That’s because piloting mini mobile suits is part of the vocation courses.”

No matter how the opponent tried to probe, even Banagher himself did not know how to explain this. Banagher was regretting that he again provided information that would allow room for Daguza to suspect, but Daguza himself simply gives a wry smile and said “This must be a so-called Newtype” and nothing else. Alberto, who was yelping away, “HURRY UP AND LET ME GO!” as he tried to struggle out of the giant’s hand, was looking at this unnerving silence.

“Don’t crush him.”

“I know.”

“Or else it’ll be hard to clear up later.”

Daguza removed the slight bitter smile on his face and said without a smile. In response, Banagher frowned and answered, " Yeah."

## Part 10

"That's the "Gundam"?"

"Looks like it…it looks completely different."

Takuya answered to Micott, who was carrying Haro, as he scratched his head with an inexplicable look. Audrey deliberately brought her neck closer over their shoulders to check the situation on the mechanic deck.

There had to be at least 30m from the open space here on the ceiling down to the bottom, and inside it, they could see the white mobile suit being held up by the mechanical hangar. The lone horn looked exceptionally eye-catching amongst the long line of Federation-styled humanoid machines. That was the "Unicorn Gundam".

*The so-called guide to Laplace Box Cardeas Vist designated—just had to be taken by the Federation army.* Audrey muttered, but thinks, *If that were the case, I'm the same as well.* Audrey sighed without Micott and the rest noticing as she diverted her gaze again at her own face and the two Federation soldiers, who were reflected off the airtight window, and she had to sigh at this nightmare that had become reality.

Mihiro Oiwakken had no reason to realize Audrey's thoughts as she looked around the dark room while looking rather jumpy. As for Riddhe Marcenas, his face was not at the window, but that expression of his looked like a child who was allowed to do anything he wanted. Though he said that it was for Micott and the others to calm down, it was just an excuse to get Mihiro's permission; the one who really wanted to see the "Unicorn' should be Riddhe himself. Riddhe led everyone to this crane control room, and truly, they could see everything clearly inside. Even though they could not see the cockpit, they can see the appearance of the " Unicorn" completely from above, even the people investigating the machine. *What's with that lapse in security after forbidding outsiders from entering?* Audrey wondered. *Is it because they haven't had an agreed view on what to do with the "Unicorn"? Or is the Federation itself like this?*

"As expected of a pilot to really know the layout of the ship."

Takuya lifted his head from the side of the window as he said that, and it seemed that he was not having the same kind of doubt as Audrey. "Kinda." Riddhe, who was praised, answered as he looked like he was not completely unhappy.

"For me…no, I myself hope to become a test pilot for Anaheim. I hope that once I graduate, I can join the army's teaching squad once I graduate, so I've been working hard at the school. I feel really honoured to be able to talk to a real pilot!"

"Wait a sec, Takuya. Now's not the time to talk about such things, right?" Micott said. "It's alright. It's a rare chance anyway!" Takuya enthusiastically said as he showed an admiring expression

at Riddhe as if he were a superstar. In response, Riddhe tried to act cool as he waved his arm,

"If you're willing to become a pilot, it's nice that you know how to seize opportunities. I'll let you see my machine later."

"Really!? Your mobile suit is the Zeta-series transformable-type machine right, Ensign? This year's equipment yearbook has the photos of the testing, and the idea of it becoming a support flight system for the "Jegan" is really…"

Riddhe seemed to be overwhelmed by Takuya's ravaging explosion of knowledge as his responses seemed to be vague while smiling stiffly. Micott, who seemed to have gotten used to it, had not been paying attention to it right from the beginning. In the end , Takuya even starts to describe and rattle away to Haro. Mihiro left Takuya as she moved behind Riddhe to whisper, "Is this good? " "It's alright, I suppose." Riddhe looked rather calm as he answered.

"It's not good to not treasure a youth's dreams."

"You're still saying such random stuff again. Besides, shouldn't you be on standby? Don't blame me when you get scolded after coming to such a place on your own."

"Don't be so strict. My mood will worsen in the waiting room when the atmosphere's so tense. The enemy won't come after us immediately."

Audrey heard both of them whispering to each other, and started to doubt, *Is this really a conversation between soldiers? Is the atmosphere floating in here really one that a battleship involved in real battles should have?* Enduring her sighs, she looked outside the window. *There is basically no sense of tension, and they're very different from my own people. This isn't a question of morale, but that they have a luxury of composure.*

*Even with half the forces depleted, there's a way as long as they can hang on through this. They had the luxury to think of such things. There might be a chance if they get reinforcements. Such a decisive composure is something my own camp doesn't have—no, we never had since the One Year War. Zeon never had any composure when they were fighting against the Earth Federation that had around 100 times the political power. What was lost will never return, and if they failed then, there wouldn't be a next time. That's because everyone had been fighting, bleeding and blown to bits in the vacuum space because of the many constraints.*

*This is probably the difference between being at ease and being uneasy …I say. Both sides' thoughts are already so different, right down to the basics. There's nothing that will raise hatred or envy already, and even I feel that the principle my side is pointless.* Through this experience that she could not understand without seeing things personally, Audrey realized that she had lots to see, and again realized that she will be in danger if she continued to stay here. She had no confidence that she could remain so calm and natural in such a

presence. Even though she was not talking now, that girl called Micott was obviously showing signs of doubt on her. *I have to find a way to escape the ship before exposing myself—*

"Then, your friend's called Banagher, right? What kind of person is here?"

Perhaps sick and tired of seeing the seeing the mechanic deck that did not have anything going on, Riddhe spoke up. Audrey interrupted her thoughts and looked and him. "Even if you ask me what kind of person he is…he's nothing special, right?" Takuya sounded puzzled, and Micott shrugged,

"He's a quiet ordinary boy. I really can't imagine him riding on that mobile suit and going into battle."

"But it's a fact that he sent the enemy packing!"

"Even if you say that…Banagher did feel different before the raid."

"Yeah. Maybe he became really motivated? He always looked lazy."

Speaking of which, Audrey was somewhat bothered as well. The Banagher she met in the recreation room did really have a completely different presence from before. Even though his appearance and voice were all the same, the pressurizing feeling he gave felt stronger—to put it, his presence felt heavier.

*What happened to that person who touched my hand as he held me close? What caused him to end up piloting the "Unicorn"?* "But he managed to win because of the capabilities of the machine, right? Besides, that's a "Gundam"!" Audrey, who again looked around the mechanic deck, was shocked by the voice. On hearing Takuya say such confident words, Micott frowned and said, "What do you mean by that?"

"That Amuro Ray who piloted the first "Gundam" was also a student too! The Camille Bidan who piloted the "Zeta Gundam" and Judau Ashta who piloted the "ZZ Gundam" are the same as well. Letting amateurs become pilots is basically a tradition amongst "Gundams"!"

"…You really know your stuff." Riddhe said. Takuya laughed aside Riddhe's obviously lethargic wry remark as he proudly said, "I researched on it before!"

"Speaking of which, this Nahel Agrama became the mothership for the Gundam squads during the First Neo Zeon War, right? It's really coincidental for it to carry a new kind of Gundam here."

*If I just talk here, I'll probably be involved in a hurricane of vast knowledge or something here.* Riddhe silently looks away from Takuya and stands behind Audrey. "Mobile suit maniacs are so troublesome." Riddhe whispered, and then looks over at Audrey.

"I feel that I saw your face before."

The voice that did not have any other intent in it caused Audrey 's heart to pounce. *No way.* Audrey thought, but did not have the guts to look at Riddhe's expression as she diverted her tense expression to the floor.

*The only time I was openly revealed to the public was when I was a kid , and the media most likely never showed photos of me recently. But if it's a Federation officer, there might be a chance he might have saw it before. If saying that I just look like that person doesn't work, at that moment—* Audrey clenched her fists, clearing hearing her heart pounding wildly, and on hearing Riddhe say "Ah, I remember", she inadvertently closed her eyes,

"Did anyone say that you look like that actress, Natsume Swanson?"

Riddhe's nonchalant voice caused Audrey to feel extremely weakened. *It was really stupid to relax over such a thing.* As she thought, Audrey simply answered, "I'm not so sure about things in the entertainment here." Riddhe looked downheartened that he could not continue as he scratched his head and said, "Oh, I see…" At this moment, Mihiro sighed and said, "What are you thinking of doing?" Micott glanced over at the two of them and gave a suspicious look.

*I definitely can't stay here for long.* Audrey again realized this, and right at the moment she was about to turn her eyes away from Micott, the sudden alarm rang in her ears.

"All personnel, prepare for anti-air combat. Mobile suit squadron, prepare for launch immediately."

The monotonous audio voice and the alarm echoed throughout, causing Micott and Takuya to immediately lift their heads. Mihiro prevented them from talking and looked towards the speaker, while Riddhe stood beside her and was taking the helmet that was strapped to his neck. "…They're here?" He muttered as he threw the thing inside the helmet to Takuya. Once Audrey recognized that was a mini plane model, he had already put it on.

"Help me take care of it. Don't break it." Riddhe said to Takuya, who received the model, "Mihiro, bring these guys to somewhere safe" and then pulled the fastener down. He, who rushed to the operations room's door, showed a stern expression that was completely different from before. Takuya did not know what to do as he took the plane modeal, asking with a doubtful voice, "What's going on?"

"May be the enemy attacking this time. Hurry up and head back to the living quarters!"

"You say an enemy's…coming back again?"

As Takuya's face turned pale, standing beside him was Micott, who covered her ears with her hands, saying "I had enough of this …!" The people inside the mechanic deck were starting to show signs of movements as well as the people who looked like guards were leaving the crowd. Audrey looked around for Banagher, only to find nothing as she carried the floating Haro. She repeated the

term in her heart ‘Enemy attack’. With the “Garencieres” fighting strength alone, Audrey did not feel that Zinnerman would come over to attack on his own. *Did “Palau” sent reinforcements? It’s still too early to conclude.* Audrey thought. The chilling feeling caused her to leave the window, and Audrey was told by Mihiro, who carried Micott, to hurry up. She then left the room of the operations room with Takuya.

Several crew members’ panicked expressions floated by the red light area. They continued to put on their spaceships as they moved forward, only to realize that the partition walls were all sealed up completely. As their roars rang, Audrey thought of a name who could make the overly-early reinforcements arrive early .

*Full Frontal. If he were the man called “The Second Coming of Char”, or*—the guess that came after did not become words as Audrey exerted more strength into the hand holding onto the lift grip.

# Chapter 2

## Part 1

<Norm Basilicock. Romeo 001, launching>

As he reported that he was leaving the ship through the wireless communicator, squad leader Norm's "ReZEL" number 1 slid out from the catapult deck. Riddhe saw his thruster flare on the all-view monitor, and grips onto the control stick.

"Riddhe Marcenas, Romeo 008. Launching!"

The display of the countdown timer showed 0. The G force seemed like it was trying to rip off the flesh on the bones as it struck the body, and the catapult deck beside his feet was immediately at its end. Riddhe stepped on the pedal and let the " ReZEL" number 8 fly out of the "Nahel Argama". The wasteland that was right below the ship—the destroyed scenes of the colony flashed by his eyes, and in less than 2 seconds, the machine thrusted itself into the dark vacuum.

Perhaps they were crushed by the pressure from the inside. The debris of the colony look just like crumbled waffles. The passing scenery that was tightly packed together showed the scenery of a phantom city in the vacuum. No matter whether it was the width of 1km all around or the amount of gas floating about, even though this place had many conditions that allowed for the "Nahel Argama" to hide its presence, one would still want to look far away after seeing that white ship object being buried by junk. It

looked like there ware bugs or something clinging tightly onto the back of wilted leaves and climbing up.

The ship was floating around with shrapnel of all sizes floating around, and the cloud of space junk that was 100km wide in diameter expanded up, forming a debris field that was much thicker within the shoal space region. This was the aftermath of that first battle of the One Year War that increased to such scale that it became the largest fleet battle in history—the colony that was destroyed in the Battle of Loum now looks like this. The Earth Federation and Republic of Zeon clashed with each other directly in this Battle of Loum, right before the Antarctic treaty that forbade the use of weapons of mass destruction. It was said that several colonies were destroyed by the notorious nuclear bazookas. *When they were suddenly sent flying into space with the rubble of the artificial land, did the people manage to realize that they died?* Realizing this, Riddhe felt a chill down his spine. He shook his head slightly and turns his gaze to the front.

And right in front of Riddhe, the following descendants of those who did such damage—the remnants of the Neo Zeon army who were given the derogatory term "Sleeves" were moving towards them. <Using the IFF, not responding and not slowing down.> The wireless radio let out a signal and he could hear the Lieutenant Homare's "ReZEL" number 4 moving beside him side by side. Riddhe makes a simple check to see that his mobile suit had stopped accelerating. The core reactor was still in good condition, and as he was equipped with a large weapon, the beam launcher, the machine itself was a lot heavier than usual. Riddhe stepped on

the pedal and lets the boosters flared out its jets to maintain the machine's posture. He increased the output to 1.5 times to match the equipped beam launcher.

<Romeo 001 to all units. We're using Delta formation. Make effective use of the remains>

As he moved in front, Squad Leader Norm activated the main thruster and moved right at the target. Riddhe and Homare's machines take the two sides. The "ReZELs" formed a triangular formation in the debris. As there was a chance that they might crash into the debris that was overly packed, Riddhe and gang did not change their machines into waveriders. The 3 mobile suits boosters let out short bursts as they moved forward, matching the speed of the remains that were of varying sizes and keeping their hands at a position such that they could shoot immediately when needed.

"We're approaching the ship. Please respond. This was the " Nahel Argama" of the Earth Federation army's Londo Bell. Please state your affiliation and stop your flight. Your ship has entered out ship's defensive line."

There were no Minovsky Particles nearby—because there was no need for that when they could hide their whereabouts in the shoal space region–the communication operator's voice sounded a lot clearer than usual. It was not Mihiro, but Communication Officer Bellard this. *Mihiro was left to be in charge of the civilians, and it seems that she is removed from active duty for now.* As he wondered about this, Riddhe removed the safety of the beam launcher. He used the 30m long rock as a shield and pointed at the target.

They were at the border of absolute defense at the target, and the distance was less than 10m. The target's movements were not changing. Even though it was moving slowly in a straight line while showing the form of debris, one could still detect heat signature from it. On the debris that was formed by the war 16 years ago, joking aside, there might still be heat left in it.

"You terrorists, even if you want to pretend to be a stone block …"

Muttering this, Riddhe placed his hand on the trigger on the control stick. This movement caused the "ReZEL"s mechanical arm to move, and the beam launcher that's the size of an enemy unit points itself at the front. *I'll scare the enemy by pretending to shoot, and then immediately move my position to provide cover for squad leader Norm.* As Riddhe again reaffirmed the basis of the attack he was taught, he stared at the target inside the reticule. Suddenly, < Wait!> Norm's voice rang.

Norm's unit, which was supposed to be the offense unit, moved to the front. Riddhe kept his position such that he could shoot anytime, moved to a distance such that the optical sensor could detect the profile, and stared at it. The enlarged window of the all-view monitor appears in the corner, and the image that was somewhat crude in definition was corrected by CG. The target's length was less than 50m, and the shape was…

"What the heck…?"

Riddhe's fingertips, which were locked on the trigger, shuddered slightly.

## Part 2

"You say it's junk?"

It's been 6 minutes and 30 seconds since the order was given to begin battle. On hearing the report from the mobile suit squadron that was launched, Otto Mitas could not help but ask. "That's what they said." First Officer Liam Borrinea calmly said.

"We've determined it to be the debris of a Salamis-class ship. It seems that the backup power was still working, and the heat sensor ended up determining it to be something unknown. There were no signs of enemies nearby, and there were no signs of survivors."

"It would be amazing if there were. That's a ship that was sunk more than 10 years ago."

Otto grumbled at the report made by the communications officer and sighed, undoing the fastener of the helmet's latch. *Most likely, it was the dead souls of the Loum battle and other bodies knocking into each other or something and started to float around ending up reaching the sensor range of the "Nahel Argama". The backup power source that was thought to be an unknown object seemed to be activated when it collided, causing a short circuit. That should be the case.*

Vice-Captain Liam and the rest removed their helmets as well and pulled their normal suits collars out to allow air to move in. The horse-shaped bridge on the highest level of the "Nahel Agrama" was not as wide as it looked to be from the outside. In this space that was only about 10m, there's the Captain seat at the middle rear area, which Otto was sitting at, a seat on the left and right side, one for the communicator and the other for the sensor monitor operator, each facing the panels on the side walls. At the front end of the bridge, starting from the left, there were the navigator, steering operator and weapons controller seats, and right above their seats, there was the main screen on it with many monitors. The windows were set halfway around the bridge, ensuring that it had visibility of ships in the Minovsky era. This layer of window was made of extremely hard plastic, and it could block radiation and even the heat of beams. The front of the bridge was covered with 4 such layers of this thick window panel, and the back part was reinforced with multiple bulletproof armors. With this, even though they would not have to deploy the protective shutter in battle and could see the outside scene with their eyes, on the other hand, the bridge that's pressured by the thickness of the shells became much narrower.

In the current age where ordinary bridges were built separately from a battleship's bridge, one could not deny that the "Nahel Argama" bridge's construct resembled more of the old styled concept. But during the One Year War, there was neither time nor technology for the ship to have that level of protective measures. Otto looks at the main screen in front of him, saw the debris of the Salamis-class ship that had 2/3 of its body chiseled away, and felt a little spooked out as he stared at that burnt remnant now.

Most probably, the turbine took a direct hit, and the inside immediately exploded. In that situation, nobody would be able to escape successfully. “Really…are all the parts that aren’t human taken away from the junk here?” Otto muttered to himself as he turned his back on the main screen. If it were his grandmother, she would probably draw a cross in front of her chest. But to Otto, who was an atheist, it was rather rare for him to even pray silently in his heart for a single moment.

“Even if it’s that kind of thing, it’s a piece of treasure to those guys from the recycling business. Shall we contact them to earn some bucks?”

Otto tried to speak up in a motivated tone to hide the fear inside him, but the laughter he hoped for never appeared, and he could only see First Officer Liam, who’s returning back to the navigation seat, roll the thick eyelids. That large burly 40 year old female, both horizontally and vertically, was larger than Otto himself, and like usual, stares at him without a smile, showing a frivolous attitude as she turns back to the console. Otto breathed hard through his nostrils to make up for this blank timing and ordered with a somewhat tired voice, “Alert removed. Operations to resume as per normal. Let the mobile suits return back to the ship. ”

Communications Officer Bellard broadcasted this to the entire ship, and Liam looks back at Otto again, saying, “Was this good?” Otto was overwhelmed by that abnormally forceful poker face, and asks back, “Was there a problem?” Her face that was covered by some form of unknown make-up was staring at Otto, and she

turned back forward without saying anything. *What's going on?* Otto did not even have the strength to sigh out as he removed the helmet and looks up at the ceiling.

It's said that a captain's nightmare would be two things, one, losing a ship, and two, riding on a ship with a crew that's not on good terms with him. However, Otto himself felt that there should be an additional item, and that will be having a large woman who was so hard to handle that he could not let his guard down around her as the First Officer. Otto managed to fight his way to the rank of a captain without any obvious battle accomplishments or camaraderie with people, only through his general qualifications. It was one thing for the battleship itself to be an unorthodox model that was hard to maneuver; it's another thing for First Officer Liam 's existence to prick his nerves no matter when. Instead of saying that there were too many incompatible things between them…it's more like she never had any intent of getting along. Whether it's for good or bad, one could say that Liam had the temper of an artist, but her silent presence will sometimes overpower the captain and even dominate the atmosphere inside the bridge. Of course, it's not like she herself didn't try to avoid this situation through her own means, but her expression that already lacked emotion could give off a frivolous vibe. Sometimes, the crew on the ship will even say random things like "Captain Liam, First Officer Otto".

In fact, in terms of instinctively detecting danger like an animal, her instincts were sharper than his, and her simple personality of ensuring the safety of the ship was guaranteed. That's why he could not just leave her alone like that. Otto had already been looking forward to an ordinary life with no extraordinary events,

but the aftermath of the battle this time may affect him in some way. *No, I might not even be able to guarantee that I will survive this time.* Thinking about it this time, Otto's heart was covered with a layer of gloom.

Ever since the battle started, the command given by the advising headquarters were to 'retreat' and 'remain on standby'. They were only told to first leave "Industrial 7" before the media surrounded them; remain on standby until reinforcements arrive, and nothing else. They lost more than half of their fighting capabilities, and the enemy was still out there, so even without instructions, they could only retreat. Even though they entered deep inside the shoal space region and use the debris of the colony as a place to hide, it's been more than half a day since they were left alone.

*The retreat point was sent from the base coordinates of L1, so there's no reason why the reinforcements could not find as. Since this mission is so special, is the reason why the reinforcements are so slow was because the higher-ups were arguing over 'adjustments' because of the unexpected damage from the battle? This might be more appropriate. It will be alright if we can get contact with the command of Londo Bell,* Otto thought. *If there's something, the Londo Bell fleet will be on standby. Once they know that an ally is in trouble, they will hurry over to assist without waiting for the senators to make their decisions. But since we're undertaking this secret mission under a direct from the Senate Council, we could not just make contact with our original affiliation as we wish—*

*Do we even have a next move?* Otto felt tired over his thoughts that were going nowhere, and felt that it's time to tidy his head that had been thinning in hair over the past few hours. He saw

Commander Daguza Mackle walk in front the automatic door at the back, and hurriedly puts the captain's hat that was hung on the side of the seat.

Daguza was wearing a deep dark brown normal suit which one would identify him as a member of ECOAS, and he removeed his helmet, turning his head around to look. He seems to understand what was going on with such a motion, and turns his narrow eyes at Otto, saying, "May I know if it's true that you mistook debris for an enemy unit?" Daguza asked with a voice that sounded courteous "Just like what you're seeing." Otto answered back coldly.

"Luckily, we're not facing the enemy…up till now, there were still no signs of our army appearing."

Otto finally said with a wry tone. To Otto, the reason behind so much trouble was because of the unshakeable fact that COAS used them as a transport. To this transport captain who did not have much authority, ECOAS and the higher-ups of the Federation could be said to be birds of a feather. However, Daguza did not seem to mind. The large body with the cast wrapped around his left arm was standing beside the Captain's side,

"Leaving aside our allies, the enemy will definitely arrive." He continued without emotion,

"Unlike us, the "Sleeves" have a very simple objective. A simple enemy will be much faster in their movement."

Liam gives a sinister look at Daguza. All the crew in the ship felt repulsed by the ECOAS members, but even since they left the dock, she seemed to have twice the hatred for Daguza than anyone else. *Why in the world is this guy here?* Otto leaves aside Liam's expression that was telling him this, sighed and says, "That "box" they were talking about…?"

"That's right. The enemy felt that we've taken the "box"."

"How can you conclude so?"

"There's no evidence to deny this. Even though the enemy's depleted as well, that four-winged mobile suit is still out there. Once there's a chance to get it, they will use force to come over to check."

One could feel that beside Liam, everyone in the bridge suddenly jerked. Everyone knew that with their current firepower, they could not match the enemy machine that's equipped with psycommu and was like a monster. *Do I have to say it?* Liam glares at Otto with the blaming look, "Looks like you're trying to say that now's not the time to leisurely wait for reinforcements." Otto seized the initiative to talk.

"Yes. We'll first break through with this ship before the enemy discovers us. It will be smarter to leave this space region."

"Do you want me to ignore the orders from headquarters? Something like this…"

"Is within the jurisdiction of the current commander. A captain makes a decision by considering the safety of the ship and the crew, and after that, he could get recognition when everyone saw that he managed to preserve the weapons."

Otto cannot say anything that will ensure the pride of a captain in response to Daguza's solid logic. At this moment, Daguza seized the initiative and added on, "We should hurry and return back to "Lunar Two"."

"The Gundam -type mobile suit that was taken back may very likely be related to the "Box". The Senate Council will also hope for us to do such a thing."

This report did reach headquarters. "But…" Otto's eyes start to look away. He would not have any standing if he let Daguza beat him completely in giving suggestions. "I agree, captain." Otto was panicking over what to argue back about as another voice rang inside the ship.

"But we're not heading to "Lunar Two", but the moon."

As he says that, Alberto makes his way into the bridge. The normal suit he's wearing makes his plump body stand out further as he stood beside the captain's seat. He glanced at Daguza and gives a polite smile that was hard to stomach, saying "Unlike " Lunar Two" that's on the other side of the Earth, the moon was just nearby, so it will be easily to head there, I suppose?" *More than that, I'm really bothered that you would just randomly come in here.* Before Otto could say that, Daguza let out a calm voice and said, " Not necessarily." The fuse starting the debate immediately lit up.

"The enemy's predicting that we will head to the Moon as well. There's a possibility that we will be ambushed on the way. No matter how far the distance will be, we should move towards " Lunar Two"."

"Space is large. I don't think it's easy to ambush us. Besides, we can still break through the ambush with our remaining fighting strength, right?"

"Our movements within the shoal space region are limited. Besides, in terms of military affairs, losing two-thirds of our fighting strength is practically total annihilation. Right now, it's not a situation where we can simply force our way through."

"In that case, we could not get to "Lunar Two", right? Aren't you a little too hasty to bring that "Gundam" back to the military, Commander Daguza?"

"We'll naturally feel anxious if we don't get reinforcements. That's because the military command seem to have some civilian pressure in this mission."

"That sounds like an excuse from you. You have to finish any mission. Isn't that what a soldier should do? It will be unreasonable to blame it on us when the mission fails."

"Because of this, I have to speak up as a soldier. Right now, we should have this ship break through this space region and return back to "Lunar Two". There's no other way to complete this mission."

"What was your mission? To prevent the "Box" from falling into the hands of Neo Zeon? Or to use this chance to grab the "Box " and let the army use it?"

"Since you say so, Mr Alberto, what do you plan to do after taking the "Box" back to the moon? Are you going to lock the "Box " back into the shared treasury between Anaheim and the Vist Foundation like the past?"

This tug-of-war that left the captain aside finally paused at this point. As Alberto immediately tried to argue back, "KNOW YOUR PLACE!" Otto roared to stop him.

"This is a bridge, not a place for you to carry out your debates, and definitely not a place where outsiders could randomly come and go at will! I agree that ECOAS can do whenever they want to in this mission, but I didn't say that your suggestions are welcomed, Commander Daguza."

Daguza was definitely a mature adult for shutting up and backing away, but on the other hand, Alberto gives a smug look while looking like he managed to win this time, " YOU TOO, MR ALBERTO!" and Otto could only do the same to him.

"Even if this is a secret mission, the limits of our ship's actions are completely based around counter-terrorism. The reason why the reinforcements are delayed is simply because of a problem with the procedures, nothing to do with the "Box" at all. I hope you don't forget your role as a civilian inspector."

Even though he already knew that these would be words of an idealized scene, Otto said so as he stood by his words. “If that’s the case, I’m fine with it…” Alberto looks like he was not listening as he scratched his sagging cheek.

“Right now, the “Nahel Argama” is an independent force that was commanded by the Senate Council at the last minute. Under the jurisdiction of the counter-terrorist laws, our ship is already considered one of the few fighting forces who can act on their own without the Federation Senate’s permission, right? Who knows how much time we will take letting the main forces mobilize…as an inspector, I still suggest that we head to the moon. This is to prevent you from having to resign over such a large responsibility, captain.”

“Londo Bell has carried out countermeasures, but the Senate Council may be deliberately withholding information. Londo Bell might not even know that we’re waiting here to while they’re wary of multiple terrorism acts. I feel that we should head back to “Lunar Two” and wait for the Senate Council’s instructions.”

Daguza spoke up after Alberto did so. “I AM THE CAPTAIN HERE! ANYTHING WITHIN THIS SHIP WILL…” suddenly, a siren rang, causing the roaring Otto to swallow his words.

While everyone was still frozen there, Liam had already turned towards for the sensor operator’s seat. “What’s the matter!?” Otto asked with an enraged tone. “Another misjudgment. It looks like the piece of debris just now was slowing down.” The sensor operator’s voice caused Otto to be rooted.

"It's probably some cooling agent or something accumulated inside spraying out. The target's heat source is unstable. It's a little hard to determine the identification conditions for it."

Once the alert instruction was removed, Liam said with a calm voice. *A Salamis-class debris floated here through some coincidence, slowed down due to some coincidence, triggering the motion sensor and the alarm?* Otto holds back his sigh and asked, "What's the relative velocity?"

"Zero comma. It's already floating right above our ship."

The main window shows the remnant that just so happens to be right above the ship. If the speed and heat weren't stable, the Salamis-class debris would be mistaken as an unidentified unit once it changed trajectory. Though he could only pray for it to hurry up and leave the range, it just had to be of the same relative velocity as the Nahel Argama. "Was there a dead soul of Loum occupying it?" Otto glanced aside at Alberto who was saying it like it was somebody else's business, grabs onto the handrail tightly and sighs hard. *As a captain, I must not randomly roar out. I have to remain calm.* Otto muttered to himself within his chest that's about to explode and commands with a highly restrained voice, " Let the mobile suit squad remove it."

"We should be able to push it out if it's of that size."

"But they returned back."

The already impeccably calm Liam answered. "What?"

"They've returned back to the ship as you commanded before."

*That's what I was trying to ask you just now* The emotionless Liam's expression was saying so. *Be clearer so that I could understand!* As Otto argued back deep inside his heart while biting his lips, Communication Officer Bellard says, "Should we order them to launch again?" Otto saw that Daguza was looking away in an unimportant direction, and Alberto was giving a vague smile. The self-restraint he had several seconds ago was pointless as he roars, "SHOOT IT DOWN WITH THE MAIN CANNON!"

"Yes…" The weapons operator answered as he looks past Otto and right at 'Captain" Liam'. "Why aren't you repeating it!?" Otto's enraged voice overwhelmed his doubt.

"Yes, main cannon, ready to be fired. Bridge's designated target is…" The weapons operator frantically turned his face to the console and hurriedly sent the instructions to the gunnery room. Otto snorted out warm breath from his nose and steadied himself on the Captain's seat again. Liam gave him a hesitant look. *To heck with that, I'm the captain here. I can't let my First Officer's expression affect my own view, and there's no reason for me to be told off by other squads or civilians. To a crew, a captain has to have god-like authority here. Isn't this the pride and tradition of the seafarers ever since the times of the Navy?*

*Even so, wouldn't it be too casual for me to use the main cannon?* As a fearful wind brushed Otto's back, the weapons operator's report can be heard, "Front cannon, firing preparations complete." causing Otto to swallow his saliva. *Daguza and Alberto are looking at well. I could not take back the order. I'll be looked down on by others all*

*the more.* As he made up his mind, Otto squeezed out a voice, “Get ready!”

“FIRE!”

## Part 3

A mega-particle cannon of a battleship-class ship could be seen, and the power output was vastly different from a mobile suit’s beam rifle. The beam released by the enemy ship was a thin light that looks like a thread, and one could see it with the naked eye. The Salamis-class debris that was directly hit gave out light in the explosion and scattered all over the place, becoming small flickering lights. Marida Cruz saw all of that.

<Just as expected. They even earnestly used the ship’s cannon for us. Now we know the position of the enemy>

Gilboa Sant’s voice echoed throughout the bridge, and they could tell that he was extremely agitated through the wireless radio. Marida let her body float behind the steering seat and stared at the pitch black vacuum that extends out infinitely outside the window. Gilboa Sant’s “Geara Zulu” was about 90km away from this “Garencieres”, and was making full use of the sensors of the machine to detect the space region the enemy ship was in. From the relative position of less than 200km away, they should be able to see the beam and the explosion clearly. If the situation was good , they might even be able to detect the enemy’s correct position.

They found a piece of debris that was of the right size, cause it to produce heat, and let it float to the shoal space region that might

have the enemy ship hidden inside. Once the enemy ship mistake it for an unknown enemy unit and send out units to intercept it, they could deduce the location of the ship through the units' location. The "Sleeves" basically viewed the Shoal Space Region as a garden, so it was not hard for them to deduce a specific coordinate from a vague position. Also, the enemy ship firing the main cannon so carelessly allows them to save a lot on manpower. "Alright, call Gilboa to come back." Leaving aside Suberoa Zinnerman's voice, Marida asked herself, *What kind of enemies are they…*

*From the experiences of what happened in Industrial 7, I could tell that they're a squad that's not used to battle. An ordinary Federation ship that viewed daily training as part of work…are they such an enemy? Then what's the mysterious pressure I feel—*

"We're moving to an area where we can carry out laser communication, and we'll send out a message to the "Rewloola". Is there still no actions at Industrial 7?"

"Just ships moving to and fro from the moon. Side 2 is sending aid, but there's no signs of any forces residing there."

In response to Zinnerman's question, the other crew member who took over Gilboa's seat answered as he sat on the navigator's seat. The optical sensor received the visual image that's far away, and there was an interrupted electronic news broadcast from long distance that was mixed with static. In the past few hours, he had been keeping his hand on the headset to listen to the situation. " Don't tell me that ship got abandoned." Flaste Schole said as he sat at the steering seat. Half a day had passed since then, and even the

civilian aid had started. It was really strange that there was not even a Federation ship coming over for reinforcements. “They probably suffered by undertaking such a dishonorable mission and were most likely viewed to not have existed in the first place.” Leaving Zinnerman’s words behind, Marida focuses her consciousness in the vacuum.

The debris floating around absorbed the sunlight far away and let out white lights that were vaguely bright and faint at times. This was the shoal space region Marida was used to seeing, the space dust that distorts with the bright light. On that side, the remains of the colony were gathered, having a hidden heavy ‘ presence’ inside. It was not the kind that could be felt on the battlefield, the ‘presence’ that would come over at her, but the ‘ presence’ that’s coming out from a certain existent, one similar to the breathing of a beast…

“What is it, Marida? You sensed something?”

The doubtful voice hit her from behind as the consciousness that was being sucked into the vacuum returns to the body. Marida turned to the captain’s seat and looked at her master who detected her reaction through her eyes. They do have reinforcements, but the “Garencieres” had a setback in the mission, and was now isolated without help, which makes them not so different from the enemy ship. Marida sensed Flaste and the rest pricking their ears, and she, who was relied on as the sensor amongst the crew, was shown looks of concern. She lowered her head and says, “No, it’s just…”

“I feel that the princess isn’t in Industrial 7 anymore.”

Unexpected words came out from Marida's mouth, and she shut up. She had never thought of this before until now—but she did realize it when she said it out. She sensed 'her' presence when she went by the mysterious pressure given off by the enemy's ship. *That's right, did I hear 'her' voice before when I fought with that white mobile suit that's most likely kept there…?*

"You're thinking too much."

Zinnerman approached Marida from behind and put his hand on her shoulder, causing her to jerk.

"The "Rewloola" will immediately attack that ship. Whether they have the "Box" or not, we just need to go back to Industrial 7 after that. We'll definitely find her."

Marida felt a sense of warmth in her shoulder that was touched. *That's right. It's not my job to think. I just need to follow this person who 's giving me warmth from his hand behind me.* "Understood, master." She answered softly and temporarily releases the strength inside her. Zinnerman supports her loosened body with one arm and scratches the hard beard on his chin.

"Let's check out Full Frontal's abilities."

## Part 4

"The "Garencieres" sent a report to us?"

The moment he entered the door, Angelo Sauper asked with a voice that was loud enough to echo throughout the entire bridge. Sitting on the Captain's seat was Ship Captain Hill, who gives an unhappy look to him, frowning as he says, "We're able to search out the target's L1 basic target thanks to their report."

"It seems that they're near the remnants of the colony. There aren't any other enemies around. In another three hours, we can capture the enemy in our range."

"Just like what we expected. Those guys are left on their own. That's what happens to those who failed in their own secret mission."

The smile on Angelo's lips widened as he put his hand on the back of the Captain's seat. Even though it might be viewed as being unruly, Hill had no intent on correcting him. As the piloting crew of the transport carrier was in charge of protecting their forces, the atmosphere was such that they will allow for any forms of insubordination and overruling of authority. Amongst them, Full Frontal's own escort squad's identity was even more unique. Angelo ignored the Vice-commander's look of frustration as he turned his eyes to the navigation screen.

Down the indicated arched trajectory of L1 in a block of shoal space region, the light spot representing the target was blinking. The coordinates were <L1+02373.E39034.N44393>. The speed and distance in space could only be indicated in relative terms, but the relative positions between the Earth and the Moon would remain constant. If the average value of the gravity of Earth and the Moon

was used, they could at least mark an absolute value on the coordinate trajectory. At their current speed, they will need 3 hours before reaching their target. If they accelerate, they would reach the target earlier, but it was no picnic accelerating too much in the shoal space region. Even though they were using their own shoal space region maps that were much more detailed than the universal specifications, they could not avoid all the debris, and the ship itself was grazing by space dust and rubble of all sizes. Angelo felt that Ship Captain Hill's judgement was correct and simply looked around at the bridge with more than ten communication operators working.

The bridge of the "Rewloola", which had entered space for less than 5 years, was still considered a new model. This bridge in particular had an outstanding view and wide space, which Angelo really fancied. The unique traits were the ceiling that was most likely two levels high and the setup that puts the navigator's seat cleanly in mid-air with support, allowing the operators to work right above the Captain. The observation window that was designed for one purpose only was put at the front to preserve sight, the 3-dimesional space was effectively used, and all the designs on the bridge could be used independently in battle. It could be said that the "Rewloola" itself was one of the results of the ship-building ideas during the Minovsky era that was maximized.

The ship's shape itself had quite the characteristics as well. The ship's body looked like a triangular block from above, and had many curves all over it to make it look alive. The 6 ball shaped booster tanks that were placed on both sides of the hulls look like the eggs of a living thing. It was not a far-cry to say that the "

Rewloola" inherited the design of the large battleship of the old Republic of Zeon's army, the Sadalahn-class. As for the reason why the ship itself was painted scarlet red, that was because the ex-commander-in-chief Char once rode on this ship, leaving behind a great influence.

The second Neo Zeon war was also known as Char's Counterattack. Char Aznarble was the commander of the army at that time—as the son of the deceased Zeon Deikum and also the Zeon army's Red Comet that terrorized the Federation. It was impossible for the flagship he rode on before not to be painted with the color red. He was about to send the hammer of judgement to the Federation to let the world known that the son of Zeon was to end his time of hiding. The "Rewloola" had to have the color red on it.

After an intense battle, the Neo Zeon army retreated in defeat, and the commander-in-chief Char disappeared as well, but such a closure made it hard to actually decide the winner. Londo Bell, which was the frontline of the Federation, took a devastating blow, letting the Neo Zeon fleet. After spacing into the Shoal Space region, they had an idea of using the remaining forces to launch special attacks, but after having lost their spiritual leader in Char, the Neo Zeon army was basically divided. At least half of the survivors scattered, and the fleet that became an empty space stayed in an asteroid full of resources that was basically a wasteland to catch their breaths, waiting for their annihilation—until that man called "The Second Coming of Char" appeared again, prompting Neo Zeon to rise again for the third time.

It had been 2 years after that. The "Rewloola" regained the life it had back then, and right now, the revived Neo Zeon army that was derogatory called "Sleeves" started to make use of its capabilities as a flagship. Including the Captain, most of the members were new, but there were still some deserters amongst the NCOs. Angelo felt there would not be an end to this if he was to pursue this, and he had no intent of doing so as well.

These activists included people who once escaped and yet came back after knowing that Neo Zeon was coming back, people of the Deikum sect and the Zabi sect who had been arguing against each other and started fighting over the basic ideologies as well. Angelo felt that they were all existences that could not be replaced. *What the revived Neo Zeon army needs were the passion of young people and young blood. Only the young who will not dwell in their past defeats and focus all their efforts on revolution could became the core of the organization. That man had admitted this as well. That man who had the innate nobility and talent to lead us from birth intend to fulfill the ideas of Zeon and the real independence of Spacenoids. The pain and loneliness of Mankind that's bestowed to the world was ultimately not what the vast number of vulgar people could understand. As he looks around at the bridge crew that were giving him stupefied looks, Angelo fluffs up the fringe that's sagging down to his forehead and says to Ship Captain Hill, "We're getting ready to launch."*

"The battle will end in ten minutes. We just need to watch the battle here, Captain."

"Sounds really intense. Will it really be that easy?"

On hearing Hill's distressed tone, Angelo stopped his feet that were about to turn.

"The Federation had already done this trick of using optical observation on the shoal space region. They probably know about where we are. While they will normally let us go, this situation now involves that Laplace Box or something, right? If it were so secretive that the Manhunters have to be mobilized to take it back, the news that we're closing in should be received by the enemy ship.

"The Federation's ability to adapt isn't that good. The number of forces they can hide is limited. Right now, they should be arguing amongst themselves over what they should be doing. None of them want to take responsibility for this."

"That's good if that were the case."

"There's no sign of reinforcements, right? No one's backing them, that's why." Angelo showed a formal smile and let his body float towards the door. "Besides, if those guys were so efficient, we would be annihilated. The human economy isn't so solid that it can be balanced in complete safety after all."

"An occasional terrorist attack isn't anything much if we consider the millions of jobless people, is that so?"

"That's the case. That's why there's a need to change this rotten society, to allow humanity to live on for another 100 years."

Captain Hill narrowed his eyes slightly as he answered with silence. *You're still green*, these words were telegraphed to Angelo's back, and Angelo answered in his heart *I'll remember that* as he left the bridge.

## Part 5

The moment he arrived on the mobile suit deck, the smell of grease and the body heat permeated the air inside the enclosed space, and the air that was heated by the electric cables let out such a smell. Angelo was bothered that the smell of cologne on his uniform was nullified as he kicked the floor, passed through a passage and floated to the large deck.

There were 12 mobile suits docked inside the "Rewloola". In the large and expansive space, 6 mechanical hangars were lined up on each side, and one could see the main machines "Geara Zulu" placed them. The mobile suit silhouette itself was based on the Zaku-types of the Republic, and the part that was basically the wrist had a sleeve logo drawn on it. One could tell its affiliation from the logo's color or the design itself, and this was the reason why the Neo Zeon army was derogatorily called "Sleeves". Also, leaving aside the blade antenna that indicated the leader's machine , even the shoulder armor all had flexibility that allowed affiliation or rank to be changed, which allowed the "Geara Zulu" to show the characteristic of not being a mass-produced suit.

Amongst them, the most eye-catching would be the escort squad's machine. Angelo let his body flot towards the 3 escort squad machines on the deck. The machine had sharp armor plates on both shoulders, and the fixed shields were removed, making

the silhouette more offensive. The back had two thruster tanks and stabilizers, and they were attachments that were taller than the shoulders, and one could imagine them to be like angel's wings. The other thruster tank and stabilizer that was not installed was on the back of the butt, poking out like a tail, causing the entire appearance to be more suitably described as a demon, a ferocious demon that protects the Red Comet—

Most notably, Angelo's squad leader machine was designed with a purple base coloring, making it stand out from the thick green machines. While checking the preparations for his own machine, Angelo went for the mechanical hangar's platform. As the mechanic officer and the rest were inspecting on the spare parts, the other two pilots of the escort squad quickly saluted Angelo.

These two people were the tall, lankly blond with good looks, Lieutenant Cuarón and Ensign Sergi with cold green eyes. Both of them were officers in their early 30s, and the green uniforms of the escort squad really suited them. These two backup pilots and the other mechanics on this ship who were less than 30 years old were all part of Full Frontal's own personal escort squad. However, they were given special privileges in equipment and training. Each of them was strictly chosen from the army, talents who were able to beat 100 enemies. Angelo stepped onto the platform and notified the duo, "We're sorting out in 3 hours. Remain on standby until then." Cuarón and Sergi stood still "Yes, Lieutenant Angelo." They chanted.

"It will be your first battle as part of the escort squad for you today, Ensign Sergi. How does the "Geara Zulu" of our escort squad look?"

"Yes! The machine's more specialized in long distanced combat than I imagined, but I'll try to get used to me. I won't forget your kindness in nominating me for the escort squad."

"Don't give yourself pressure. Meritocracy is Zeon's tradition. Just perform as per usual…besides, there probably won't be any chance for you to perform this time."

Cuarón gave a meaningful smile, and Sergi frowned in a puzzled manner. Angelo flicked his own fringe and told Sergi, " The Captain will be sorting out today. There's no work for us."

"…What do you mean by that?"

"You'll understand once the battle starts."

Angelo inadvertently curled his lips and turned his eyes to the mechanic behind him, ordering them, "Captain Full Frontal will be coming over. Don't ever ease up the atmosphere in the mobile suit deck until the end." The mechanic answered, "Yes, I'll inform the rest!' and floated away from the platform. Angelo watched him leave, and in his eyes, he saw a mobile suit that was docked in the deepest part of the deck. The crimson red giant was larger than the "Geara Zulu". As Angelo stared at the cockpit that was basically the abdomen of the machine, the excited Sergi whispered to him, " So the rumors are really true?"

"Like how the Captain won't wear a normal suit when sorting out."

The green eyes flickered, and Sergi looked like he wanted to say "It's like…" Angelo corrected Sergi inside his heart. *It's not that it seems, but that it is*, "Yeah, there's no need for that for the Captain."

"That's because he has the belief that he will definitely return from the battlefield."

Sergi's boyish face turned slightly red as his eyes were captured by the red mobile suit. Cuarón turned his back on Sergi, smiling proudly, while Angelo turned his eyes onto the machine that was waiting for the master to arrive. The MSN-06S "Sinanju" was a crimson red machine that used a large around of curves as part of Zeon's flair and had a elegant and streamlined contour. *That is the only mobile suit that matches that man, the Red Comet who will snatch the Box, which has a secret that can topple the Federation, and liberate the*

*world*. Angelo was immersed in his own motivating thoughts as he smiled away in a fanatical manner.

## Part 6

<All personnel, regaining space visual department. All passages open.>

A vague voice could be heard as it echoed through the speakers inside the ships. As he saw the sergeant beside him heave a sigh and remove his helmet, Banagher asked, "Is it over?"

"Yeah. You can take it off too." The sergeant answered while he took off the fastener of the normal suit. This middle-aged sergeant who was giving off a vibe that he trained officer was an NCO who was assigned to guard the command post, and it seemed that he was an old-timer who had the most experience in being a guard. He was the one who brought Banagher here to evacuate after the siren alert for battle rang. They were near the "Unicorn"s maintenance hangar, and several rows of normal suits were lined up in this room. Currently, he and Banagher were the only ones around.

As the wireless network in the ship was activated during battle, they could hear the conversations between the bridge and all the other departments. However, Banagher still could not say that he could even vaguely understand the conversations that included lot of technical jargon. Even though he could roughly tell that this raid was a bogus judgment, it was still a mystery why the main cannon of the ship was fired. As they were evacuating, he could hear messages like <Backup personnel, swap duties 5 minutes earlier><

/nokwiki> and <nowiki><Execute Assignment A>, and he could see the passengers walking around frantically at the doors. *They're working, huh?* Banagher thought blankly. *Even if they're the military, there's nothing unique about them. They're just like the workers in the factories, doing their own duties to let the ship move, that's all—*

"That's why I'm asking where you're bringing me to…haa? How will I know if the squad leader doesn't?"

The sergeant growled angrily into the room's internal phone he picked up. The lax assignment of duties caused the crew to be unable to handle the unexpected situation. *Everyone's not used to an actual battle, huh?* As he thought about that, Banagher was about to keep the normal suit he put on as a familiar color and shape crossed by him.

"Haro…?"

Banagher did not think that he made a mistake in identifying it. He went after the green ball that moved past the door and arrived outside the locker room. "Oi, don't just run out like that!" the sergeant growled. "That's mine." Banagher answered and held onto the grip lift. "Oi, wait!" Banagher kicked the floor as he ignored the sergeant who left the phone behind.

Banagher thought that he could catch Haro immediately, but it ignored his calls as it flapped its ears and nimbly turned around the corner. "Oi, you! Hold it!" as he heard the sergeant's growls behind him, Banagher switched grip lifts at a cross junction and moved down a narrow passage 90 degrees aside. *That's weird. There's no reason for Haro to ignore me like this. Maybe somebody else*

*gave it a verbal command. If the memory's not deliberately deleted later, Haro will treat the owner and anyone it talked to for a long time as a friend. If it can follow even a simple command, the only ones on this ship who are registered as friends are Takuya, Micott, and as for the rest—*

At the second turn of the cross junction, Banagher finally caught up to Haro just before it turned around the corner. As he carried it, he felt that it stopped on its own, and said, "This isn't good. You have to be with everyone." Haro's eyes merely flickered as it answered, <*Haro*> Banagher was about to return to the locker room when a hand reached out for the coat of the collar.

Banagher was pulled from the back of his head and went into a door on the passage that was opened. He wanted to share it off immediately, but got a glimpse of the emerald green eyes that shone in the dim light, and his heart pounded crazily.

"There's no time, Banagher. Listen to me."

*Audrey.* The mouth of the emerald-eyed girl covered Banagher who was about to call her name, and she showed an irritated look, muttering quickly, "Oi, brat. Answer me!" On hearing the sergeant 's angry growl pass by the door, Banagher nodded at her. Audrey released the hand holding Banagher down and led him deep into a room that was like a storeroom with all the lights switched off.

The light that shone in through the door caused the purple cape that fluttered with the air to appear. *Why is she here? What happened to Ensign Mihiro and the rest? There were a lot of things Banagher really wanted to ask, but he did not even have the time to ask as Audrey pushed him to the pile of cardboard boxes that was fastened with a belt, and*

*brought her face close to a distance where he could feel her breathing. She let out a questioning voice, "Did you really activate the "Unicorn Gundam"?"*

"Unicorn…Gundam?"

The term was something he knew, yet it felt alien to him. Banagher repeated the term that was that felt like a mysterious curse, sometimes safe and sometimes dangerous like a parrot. "So that was the name of that machine." Banagher accepted it in his heart unconditionally. "What happened?" Audrey's anxious voice repeated.

"Seemed that way…"

"You say it seems—"

"I don't really know. Everything happened so quickly. There wasn't even a warning or something…"

Banagher diverted his eyes away from the frowning Audrey as his eyes escaped to the shadow formed by the gaps between the boxes. The bloodied face in his nightmare appeared in the shadows , causing him to clench his fists.

On one hand, Cardeas talked about believing in possibilities and doing what one had to do. On the other hand, he could hear Cardeas talk through the wireless network like a war merchant. " Which one is the real you?" Banagher thought as he recalled the words Alberto said. "Alright." At this moment, Audrey sighed. She turned away as she made up her mind.

"Can you still activate it?"

Audrey's voice sounded rather sound. "Eh?" Banagher thought as he looked up. As he was held down by the intimidating stare in her eyes, he answered, "I guess…"

"Then, leave this place with me."

Her calm voice caused Banagher to hold his breath and gasp. He looked around meaninglessly, and then asked, "Here, as in, this ship?" as he stared at Audrey who was floating 30cm away from him. She however did not even nod.

"Impossible. I can't do this."

"There's always a way when you get onto the Gundam. The ship crew here isn't experienced enough. The remaining problem is to shake off the Special Forces."

Audrey said as she diverted her eyes to a corner of the ceiling. Banagher realized that there was a surveillance camera there, and exchanged looks with her serious expression. He eked out a voice, "Audrey…"

"You can still make it back to Industrial 7 now. Once you reach there, I'll deal with the machine. You'll be fine when you say that you were threatened, right?"

"But…"

"That's a dangerous machine that can't be handed to anyone. We have to destroy it before it docks in the Federation base…"

"Please wait for a while, okay…!"

Banagher was driven by the fear that was about to blow him up from within as he subconsciously grabbed Audrey's shoulders. He pulled her body down from the air and stared at the eyes that were at the same height level as him. Audrey looked over with an expression that was hard to discern.

"I don't understand what you're saying. What did you say that mobile suit is? Please explain it clearly to me."

"There's no time now. I'll explain the details to you later. First…"

"How can I decide on something without knowing what's going on!? Why must you talk to me like this!?"

"Like this…?"

"Like you have to do this, like there's a need to do that. It's really too sly to try and force someone to accept it in such a way… besides, ain't I not someone you don't nee?"

Even though he felt that it was sneaky of him to say it, Banagher still said it. Everyone only thought of saying what would be convenient to them and not actually talking heart to heart. Even

though those were the words of others, he could only feel empty as he was left in the lurch. "What can I believe now when some things have to be decided in such a situation now?"

Banagher felt that his stomach was starting to heat up as he shut up and turned his back on Audrey. He pressed a fist against a cardboard box and muttered with clenched fists, “Everyone’s making decisions on their own…”

“You too, the people here too, even that man…” The heat continued to swell and rise in him, breaking through his restrain. Realizing this, Banagher closed his eyes and squeezed out his remaining words, “Saying that he’s my father out of a sudden…”

“Father?”

“Forcing that kind of mobile suit to me, saying it’s the curse of the Vist Family, and the Laplace Box or something…I don’t even know what’s what now!”

Banagher felt that Audrey held her breath. “Are you talking, about that Cardeas Vist? Then, you’re the Vist family—”

“I don’t know! I was separated from him when I was young, and I couldn’t even remember his face. He didn’t come over to mother’s funeral, he wouldn’t even meet us, and now out of a sudden…”

The thoughts after that never became words. The hatch limiting his emotions was gone. Fear and anger raged on in his abdomen as if it was a backlash of emotions that was held for several hours.

After a stunned silence, Audrey muttered, “Such things happened …” Banagher could hear the surprised voice that seemed to understand something from behind him as he moved to reach for Haro that was floating in the air with nowhere to go.

This was an old toy that he continued to maintain and update ever since he received it as a Christmas gift at the age of 5. The familiar touch entered his clutches safely. At that time, the fad for toys ended in less than a year, and it was a long time ago since the time when the manufacturer stopped sales of Haro. Even so, Banagher never let go of Haro when he entered middle school. He would try his best to repair it himself whenever it was spoilt, and his mother would often nag at him in an annoyed manner,

*“Just give it up already. Haro’s already at its limit. Isn’t it weird to go around with an old toy?”*

*“It can still move if I repair it. That’s nothing bad about it.”*

How did the mother feel when she knew who gave that Haro to this son of hers who argued back? No, Banagher had already realized that it was a gift from his father, and his mother knew that Banagher already knew about that. Even though nobody said it out, both of them viewed that as an unspoken secret and accepted Haro as a family member. *Why am I still bringing it around? Is it because it’s the only thing linking me to the father I know? I never had the feeling of wanting to meet my father before.*

*No—I probably still want to meet him. I created an impression of father myself though mother’s words and the immaturity of my sealed memories. I let myself believe to make up for the ‘absent’ reality, and there*

*are still a lot of things I should really look forward too.* Banagher was hoping that he could one day lift his head up high and meet the man who was his father, and such an idea gave him his minimum level of aspiration and made him not stay inside the slums that were his hometown. Perhaps it was this motivation to improve that was effective in a certain way that was able to allow him to endure his mother's death and take on that loneliness of being isolated by the world.

*But in reality*—Banagher put down Haro and closed up the seal of his memories. Haro floated around in zero gravity, hit the wall and flicker its eyes, flapping its ears and making some sounds.

"…A long time ago, there was a story that was passed down like a legend."

As Haro made noises, Audrey's voice directed itself at Banagher , who moved his face slightly.

"Once the Laplace Box is opened, the Federation government will reach its end."

Banagher was driven by a pulsating feeling and turned behind. He saw Audrey rooted over there, a figure in the darkness.

"This isn't something everyone knows of. However, something that involves the center of what they call society will naturally reach some people's ears somewhere. One must fear the Vist Foundation. They have the Box. Those that follow the Foundation will have riches and honors, and those who disobey will have death…"

It felt like a supernatural story. Banagher swallowed his saliva, but Audrey shrugged him aside as she continued to state calmly,

"Nobody knows what was inside that Box, but they knew it really existed. The Laplace Box was a form of convenience obtained from the government, an invisible pressure on the government's eyes. The most triumphant example is the Anaheim Electronics company. It single-handedly controls the military needs and public needs, and won't be pursued even when it was helping Neo Zeon. Without the backing of the Vist Foundation, it would be impossible to imagine that they would have such rights. "

Banagher unwittingly used his hand to touch the chest of his jumper. The initials and crest of Anaheim Electronics was printed on it, and they left a rough feeling on his fingers.

"Cardeas Vist intended to hand that Box over to the "Sleeves"… Neo Zeon. The location was Industrial 7, the colony builder that was under the name of the Vist Foundation. However, the Federation army sniffed out signs of the deal and sent this ship and the Special Forces over. And then…"

That battle happened. Banahger sense that his body was about to tumble over as he used his hand to hold onto the pile of cardboard boxes.

"I had to prevent the Laplace Box from being handed over to Neo Zeon. I don't know Cardeas Vist's real intent. However, Neo Zeon still can't use that Box. Once that power that can topple the Federation land in their hands, there will undoubtedly be a war

that will be like the One Year War, causing devastation on both sides."

Banagher recalled the history shows he once saw on the television, the images of the colony landing on earth. It was an idea of 'throwing a colony down' that a colony in orbit was slowed down to act as a mass bomb. The military country controlled by the Zabi family, the atrocities of Zeon, the moment the megacity was wiped out, and how the landscape was changed as a result, bringing about all sorts of calamities onto the earth. There was no need for special technology and expenses. By manipulating the resources around them, they were able to cause a disaster that never happened before—*that's right, it's not difficult to destroy the world just like that.* Banagher abruptly thought.

*With some imagination and madness to do it, it's not difficult to destroy the world. There are definitely many chances to start a war of total annihilation, but people probably haven't discovered them yet. If the Laplace Box contains such methods, and if they end up in the hands of Neo Zeon that is the descendant of Zeon…*

"Neo Zeon hasn't obtained the Box yet, but since they know it exists, they will come for it no matter how many times. The same thing as yesterday will happen again. A war will start. We have to destroy it before it actually happens."

"Don't tell me, that is…"

*There's no need to hear the answer.* Audrey answered with her eyes.

"It's not the Box itself, but a guide to the Box. Cardeas Vist handed the key to open the Box, the "Unicorn Gundam"…that machine to you, his heir."

The last words Cardeas left behind and the words about the " Unicorn Gundam" everyone on the ship was rambling about started to echo in Banagher's head. He slowly floated around in zero gravity, leaning his back on the cardboard boxes. Audrey stared at him and twitched her long eyelashes slightly.

"I don't feel that the current world is perfect. We have a lot we want to say as well, but if we let so many people die…I think there 's still a way to gradually change the world's thinking. Up till now, humanity has managed to survive like this. It's better not to have such a thing like the Laplace Box—"

"Who, who are you?"

*I couldn't listen to everything you said.* He said. Audrey's shoulders jerked slightly.

"It's like you know everything about Neo Zeon…it's like I'm listening to some great person. It's different from your voice in Industrial 7."

Audrey lowered her head and closed her mouth. It was the same whenever she faced him and raised some unreasonable requests; it was the same when she said that she did not need him, the helpless look she showed during that short moment after she finished her words. The wavering of emotions that were restrained showed that she was actually rather delicate. She was smart and

had a strong sense of responsibility, but in contrast, those emerald eyes would not see anything else once she was determined. The side of her face that showed a slight smile when she called herself duckweed was alluring enough to drag him in. It was not simply because Banagher could resonate with her emotionally, but that he realized that there's a spark in the resonance to her existence.

Right now, Audrey did not have that charisma. Even as she pretended to talk in like an adult, it was the same. The way she held back by her position as she spoke covered her up. *Is it because she can't remain undefended against me once she feels that I'm necessary to her? If that's the case, I might as well be someone unnecessary to her.* " Let me hear your voice." Banagher said. *This alone won't be able to create a spark because I'm not smart enough to act based on logic.*

"I want to hear, not about what you have to do, but what you want to do. If you're willing to tell me…"

What can I do then? Banagher's voice softened as he spoke, and he was unhappy about his own sputtering as he waited for Audrey to speak up. *Logic doesn't matter. Just find something that allows you to find your passion. Find a passion that allows us to be together, that passion that can't be created in the disjointed world, that passion that can resist the icy cold world.* Banagher felt that no matter whom Audrey was, that would be enough for him to escape from here. *To save her , I have to bear the weight of the world*—even if Cardeas' words became reality.

Audrey lowered her eyes and clenched her fists, having finally showed an expression of realization. She stared at Banagher.

"I want—"

"What are you two doing?"

A cold voice suddenly rang, interrupting the rest of the words. Banagher froze and at the door from past Audrey's shoulders, who in turn was stunned. With the light source shining from the corridor, Banagher could tell that it was Micott standing at the door.

"Being all sneaky over here…what are you doing, you? Pretending to be missing along with everyone, is there something you want to discuss with Banagher?"

Micott let out stinging words as she grabbed tightly onto the door frame. Banagher felt the icy expression from her eyes as he stood in front of Audrey. "I'll take to you later, Micott…" he said " WHEN'S LATER!?" Micott's loud voice echoed throughout the room, causing the skin to tremble.

"A lot of thing was messed up ever since this woman appeared here! Are you one of the terrorists allies? Now you're intending to trick Banagher? What are you planning?"

*I just entered a trap I dug myself and forgot about*—he had such a feeling. "I…" Audrey muttered softly, only to stop midway and bite her lips. Banagher saw this and instinctively growled back, " Micott, that's not right of you." "What…" Micott cringed back as her eyes showed signs of tears.

"The colony we lived in is ruined! Slyvia and Mario disappeared like dust! Even Anaheim Electronics was blown with the ground…do you think I can forgive her!?"

No response. He felt that Micott's response was the normal one, and yet felt that he had to continue to keep a secret. Both these issues bore down on Banagher's heart, and the thought of him being the worst traitor bored down on his heart. *I can't go back to Industrial 7. I can't remain in the days with the disjointed feeling. It's really a path of no return.* All sorts of thoughts appeared in Banagher 's heart.

"If you're allied with the terrorists, I—"

She stared at Audrey with teary eyes and eked out a voice before stopping there. "Ah, over here." "Miss Micott, disappearing like that out of a sudden is really…" as they wondered why other voices came over from the passage, Takuya and Ensign Mihiro appeared at the door.

Takuya first noticed them in the room as he blinked and said, " Huh, Banagher?" Mihiro, who put his hand on Micott's shoulder, showed a shocked expression as she said with an absent-minded tone, "What are you doing here, Miss Audrey? Everyone's been looking for you." After a short pause, "Sorry, but I'm still not used to controlling the liftgrip." Audrey said the answer she had already prepared beforehand. Banagher looked back in Micott's direction after seeing Audrey answer, and realized that they

would be doomed if things were revealed here. However, Micott did not look at anyone as she merely shook of Mihiro's hand to leave the scene.

"Wait, Miss Micott!" Mihiro called out as she chased after her. Banagher too got onto the corridor and witnessed Mihiro turn around the cross junction. Takuya then got up from behind to clamp Banagher on the neck and whisper, "What exactly is going on?"

"Even if you ask…"

"I did help you speak up the last time, but actually, I still haven' t accepted things yet."

Takuya put his hand on Banagher's hand and glanced at the door of the room where Audrey was in. Banagher's fingers that were placed on Takuya's arm shuddered slightly.

"Her lack of immigration record will be exposed once we get back to "Industrial 7". You better put an end to this before that happens."

Takuya quickly finished and released Banagher, stepping on the floor to leave. *He's not actually angry, but worried about me.* Banagher stared at the back of Takuya that gave this vibe and saw a glimmer of hope. He then met Audrey's eyes at the door. *Put an end to this—how?* As both their eyes gazed into each other's "You brats actually came all the way here!?" a rude grol rang through the corridor, and the guard showed a completely different expression as he stood at the cross junction.

## Part 7

The reason why Daguza could not avoid that shadow completely was because he had to protect his lleft arm that was fastened with the cast. He quickly kicked the wall and barely managed to avoid direct collision. After seeing that person who lost her balance slightly, he gasped a little.

The person had slight wavy long black hair and long legs under her shorts. The girl who basically did not look like she was a member of the ship crew was the reason why he gasped. She probably did not use the liftgrip, but used inertia to move over. Daguza grabbed the girl as she looked like she was going to slam into the wall quickly and let her hold onto the liftgrip well.

"Excuse me…"

"No worries."

The girl did not look like she minded about this as she held onto the liftgrip and slowly moved. She was one of the civilians he met in the recreation room, the girl who brazenly said that her father was a factory owner. Daguza saw this girl who looked a little lifeless, completely different from before and mused in his heart: *To think that they'll let civilians move around the ship like that…* and sighed as he got ready to hold onto the liftgrip again.

*It's worrying that the fracture's unable to heal because of long-term exposure to zero gravity. I want to hurry up and get to a place with gravity, but how are we going to let the ship move to "Lunar Two"?*

Daguza thought of that very bothersome Alberto's face and was about to think of a way as a troubled voice could be heard from behind. "Erm…"

The black-haired girl stopped in the middle of the corridor. The half-turned face showed a hesitant expression, and once their eyes met, it looked like she intended to avoid Daguza, who noticed that the girl's eyes were drenched in tears.

"There's something I don't know who I should talk to about…"

Despite being troubled, the girl said with a depressed-sounding voice. Daguza moved his hand away from the liftgrip.

## Part 8

The metal door to the monitor room was pushed open. Conroy, who leaned the his big body on the terminal monitor, had his eyes half opened in a dazed manner.

"I want to connect with the ship's database archive. Can it be done?"

Daguza quickly spoke to stop Conroy before the grumbling about how he should be sleeping came. Conro''s expression changed the moment he saw the ID card that was obtained. " Please use it." Conroy said as he stopped his half-completed assignment and gave up his seat in front of the terminal. Daguza pulled the chair and swiped the ID on the card reader beside the computer.

Daguza typed in the 10-digit password he remembered on the keyboard with his free right hand. The log-in screen shown on the access page was the database network managed by the Federation Central Intelligence, a download right a Londo Bell ship would have. Of course, only those of cadre class could log in, and the important classified information were removed from here. However, it was an important treasure when searching for particular information—for example, the appearance of a terrorist or a fugitive. Daguza first chose the picture comparison option, and entered the ship staff's database, entered the name and gender and let the program pick up the selected photographs.

"Are these the civilians kept on board?"

Conroy let out a surprised voice as he looked at the photo shown on the terminal. All the civilians had their face photos and fingerprint data collected before they were taken on board the battleship. "This may be it." Daguza did not actually believe that girl, Micott Bartsch's testimony completely without belief, but once she mentioned it, he did notice something. He had an impression that he saw this somewhere before when he saw that person. As the relation between those two was too sudden, Daguza's mind did not have time to actually think.

The forehead, eyebrows, eyes. The data match with the photo appeared in that order, and gradually formed a complete face. The search ended, and the face that was no different from the photo was shown on the matchup column. It was a front face photo that was secretly taken, CG repaired. The name was—

"This person is…"

Conroy let out a hoarse voice as he brought his pale face to the terminal. Daguza held his fingertips that looked like they were trembling, trying not to show any emotion, and briefly answered, " Keep it down."

"Don't take your eyes off 'her'."

*That's all we can only do right now.* Daguza gave this command to a still-puzzled Conroy and closed the database.

## Part 9

The Captain's room was not a place a pilot should be entering unless there was an order. Besides, it made even less sense for a pilot to be welcomed by the captain so much if the pilot had not achieved such a huge accomplishment.

"Ah, you've arrived. Come now, take a seat here."

However, such an unreasonable situation was happening. Riddhe was prompted by Captain Otto's mysterious courteous smile as he sat on the sofa of the reception room. Right beside him was Squad Leader Norm, who was invited in earlier, giving an ugly expression as compared to Otto. Riddhe could not tell exactly what was going on as he was suddenly summoned in after being on standby, and could only remain cautious and wait for the unexpectedly excited Otto to speak up. The officer room attendant wearing a white servant uniform served some cutlery for tea and poured red tea into the trio's cup.

"This is an actual produce from Earth. It's not cheap, but it's one of the few forms of relaxation for me. I normally bug my wife to let me carry this onto the ship. Here, have some."

The attendant left the room as Otto said with a very good mood. Riddhe glanced aside to check on Norm's expression, deduced the moods, and realized that there would be no problems for him to start drinking as he sat properly, took the teacup, and answered, " Yes! I'm tucking in.". Riddhe took the teacup, had a sip, and tasted the sweetness amidst the bitterness. "Ah, that's right." Otto suddenly patted his thigh as he said this. Riddhe barely managed to take a first gulp as he resisted the urge to spurt out the red tea.

"You're born on Earth, Ensign. I suppose things like this red tea from England aren't something rare?"

Otto chuckled while giving the vibe that he's forcing things. Riddhe saw Norm's slightly moving cheeks, understood that he intended to laugh with it, and pretended to give a smile as he answered, "No, not at all." Both of them gave empty smiles that stopped inside this reception room, giving the mood that something annoying would be discussed within this room.

"Then, there is no special reason why I invited both of you. I suppose you can understand the situation in our ship now, Ensign ?"

"Yes…"

"Ever since the battle started, we had only two instructions issued from the Central Council. Retreat, and standby. I really

want to assist in the colony evacuation, but since we are on a special mission from the general headquarters, we can't show ourselves in front of the media. We could only leave the colony after taking back the spare parts of that Gundam."

*Shouldn't this be part of the Captain's jurisdiction?* Riddhe really did not want to laugh with him as he put the red tea to his lips to avoid answering.

"We're hiding inside the shoal space region like this…but there' s still no sign of reinforcements. It seems that Londo Bell has taken action, but just on usual alert. We can tell that the headquarters on Londenium have not grasped our location. Even if we want to alert Command, we can't communicate with them when we're under special orders even though we belong to them."

Otto, who took a sip of red tea, showed a faint glint in his eyes. At this moment, I thought of you." On hearing these words, *Here we go again.* Riddhe thought.

"If I'm correct, your father does have quite the high standing amongst the Central Council, correct? Ronan Marcenas. It's said that he's the chairman of the Settlement Issues Council, and also very active on national defense, a truly impressive important senator."

*And an 'if I'm correct' to top it off.* Riddhe thought. "That's correct , I presume?"

"I hope you can contact your father through a private message and raise the issue that our ship is isolated without any traces—"

"Please allow me to refuse."

Riddhe answered before he even heard the end. At this moment , he did not even look at Norm's face as he stared right at the blinking Captain Otto, trying to answer reasonably, "Isn't this against Military rules?"

"How can we send private messages during a secret mission? If it'll be against Military rule, just ask 'Londo Bell' for assistance, and things will be solved, right?"

"That's the hard part. If we send out an official request, we may be isolated by the headquarters and left out in the cold. This is the consequence of the magic of the Laplace Box'."

The Box—Laplace Box. This term that shut everyone up the day before caused Riddhe to quieten down.

"You heard of this before, so I'm not going to hide anything here. The chances of that Gundam-type mobile suit being heavily related to the Laplace Box are very high. The higher ups seemed to be keeping still while trying to decide what to do with that mobile suit. There are people who want to use this chance to get the 'box', and the people who want to restore it back in its original position; both sides are fighting it out. Well, basically, the army and Anaheim Electronics are having a tug-of-war here."

"Won't this be easy? We're soldiers, so let's just follow what the army intends."

"There are complicated costs and benefit relations involved in this. Basically, there are all sorts of people amongst the cadres in the Central Council, like those highest executive cadre members who intend to become senators and enter politics, and those congressmen who intend to move under Anaheim once they resign …it's because of these people tussling with each other that reinforcements won't come in no matter how long we wait. Even as Londo Bell asks for reinforcements, a certain level will intercept. Right now, the "Nahel Argama" can be said to be a small-scale version of the being two different sides being in the same boat, but the Manhunters and the Anaheim employees. There are so many people trying to lead the ship…that's why.

Otto put the finished cup back on the plate, and heaved a deep snort. *I see. So it's a political issue?* Riddhe's body that half-gave up on Otto reluctantly cooled down, and he drank the red tea that had no taste left. *I understand this, but it's annoying even if this is the case. That unhappy damp feeling that covered the 'family' made it all the way here—*

"However, we might have a chance of surviving if your father can pull some means from within, like give a call to Londonium's Commanding Officer Bright Noa. If it's him, he will send reinforcements while letting people think that it's a patrol. With Senator Ronan's assistance, the Central Council will not be able to get in the way much."

"It's hard to say…he's someone who views cunning policies as his life. I can't guarantee that he will take action based on the hopes here."

"His cute son is on this ship too. There's no way he will leave you alone."

The shackles binding Riddhe's heart was about to be broken as he faced the nonchalant sounding Otto. He clumsily put the teacup back on the plate and intended to glare at Otto. "I'll ask for that too ." However, the voice that was let out stopped his idea.

"I think I can understand how you feel, but there's no one we can rely on now."

Norm, who had not said a single word since just now, and had no intention of putting the red tea to his lips, was clenching the fists that were placed on his knees. "Squad Leader…" Riddhe answered as he saw his mobile suit squad leader who lowered his head and would not lift it back up, his voice stuck in his throat.

"If the reinforcements don't come, we won't be able to take revenge for those brothers who died. I can only ask of you this."

Norm's shoulders trembled violently as he lowered his head such that it was nearly hitting the table. Riddhe saw the shoulders that were trembling because of this anger and regret that was more than his, and saw Otto, who swallowed his saliva as he witnessed this. He let out a sigh from deep within.

## Part 10

*There's no other choice.* Riddhe returned back to his room and ended up spending 2 hours writing a mail to his father.

He had never sent a phone call for the past few years, let alone a message. His body did not have a function to communicate with his father, and he felt a chill when he started off with 'Dear Father'. He wrote the letter while his heart was basically in agony. Riddhe was really about to faint when he ended off with 'From your son Riddhe'. *Someone like me actually ended up writing a request for help from that dad—*

No outsider would be able to understand this mental trauma that was like forcing a painter to step on his own painting. He quickly finished the mail, sent it to the bridge, and felt a surging urge to kill Otto for merely giving a 'sorry to trouble you' formality on the surface.

*Our ship will now be heading to an area where radar communication can work. We will be on second-level alert when leaving the shoal space region, but please remain in your own room, Ensign."*

"It can't do if we make a request to the senator while getting his prince hurt!"

Otto gave a wink that gave the impression of a frozen face, and cut off the chatter linking from the bridge. To Riddhe, this might be a good thing. "DAMN IT!" Riddhe's outcry caused his soles to be expanded on the monitor, but luckily, this scene was not seen by the Captain. Riddhe stamped on the communicator panel and went to lie on the bed.

Soon after, the siren telling the crew to remain on standby could be heard, and the engine which sounded like an air-conditioner increased. This was the sound of the Nahel Argama being ready to

launch. They were leaving the remains of the colony towards a place where they could send messages by radar—a place where the radar would not be affected by the debris. On hearing the noise that came with the jerking of the furnishings in the room, Riddhe thought in the heart: *Whatever you want. No matter where I go, the Marcenas' name will never let me go. It'll reach to the ends of the universe and surround me with its irritating damp feeling. The man who walks through that moisture leisurely will then give an arrogant wry smile and say: It's about time for you to become an adult. Humans have roles they should perform since the moment they're born. You shouldn't be having a role of such a character on the other end like a pilot.*

*Then, what's my role? Am I going to use my parents' protection as a weapon? Reclaim the mantle to my family to answer everyone's expectations? Do they want me to stay in this world where every corner is grey? Learn how to distinguish between black and white? Don't joke around. I want to distinguish between black and white with my own power. A pilot doesn't have a grey region. The superiority of abilities can decide life and death, and I survived from it. I tried my best. That's because I ran away from 'home' and never thought of relying on it once.*

However—the actual battle from before proved that the biggest difference between life and death was luck. It taught Riddhe that the difference between sitting or standing when the god of death swung its scythe would decide things. The thing that decided these differences was the change in situation, and a pilot, a character on the far end of the spectrum, had no power to change the current situation. *This ship is asking me for the power to change this situation to break this deadlock. They're not asking for this pilot called Riddhe, but the direct blood kin of the Marcenas…*

He was tired. He had no motivation on wanting to escape to another place. Riddhe yawned as he noticed the thing floating his eyes, and widened his eyes that were about to close. The plane model that was placed on the table seemed to be floating because of the tremor from before. Riddhe grabbed onto the red baron plane model that was famous during an old century war, and let it float in the air where gravity had no effect. He thought, *Oh yeah, my beloved Grumman is still kept by someone else. I left it with that mobile suit maniac kid…Takuya, was he?* Riddhe got off the bed, stretched and moved towards the room door.

The civilians that were kept were kept at the recreation room in the same gravity block. *It was tiring to talk to that brat, but it sure is better to shake off my thoughts instead of being gloomy by myself.* Riddhe was rather excited about meeting Audrey again. He left his room and took his first step towards the recreation room as an intense tremor from the floor caused him to stop in his tracks.

Riddhe did not know what was going on. His body slammed into the ceiling, recoiled back onto the floor, and the corridor lights changed to the emergency red lights. Another tremor rocked the ship, activating the siren. The announcement from the operator was blocked by the explosions that rocked the ship, and a force that was 3 times stronger than before caused Riddhe to fly off.

This time, Riddhe got into a protective stance and kicked towards his footing that was either the ceiling or the floor. *An enemy attack—and the ship took a direct hit. This is fast. Where is the attack coming from? There won't be an answer even if I think here.* Riddhe held onto the liftgrip that was jerking slightly and let his body glide towards the mobile suit deck.

## Part 11

In this era where Minovsky Particles could render electronic weapons ineffective, the concept of guided missiles had long vanished from the battlefield. The times where guided missiles that would not let go of their targets, the era of the button wars had become a relic. This battlefield that could be seen before the Middle Ages was brought up to space as both sides fought it out while being able to see each other's locations. The mobile suit that was at the front acted as a cavalry, while the ship at the back took on the role of moving its base. The missiles in this era would be less effective than even flaming arrows if the ships do not engage in close combat.

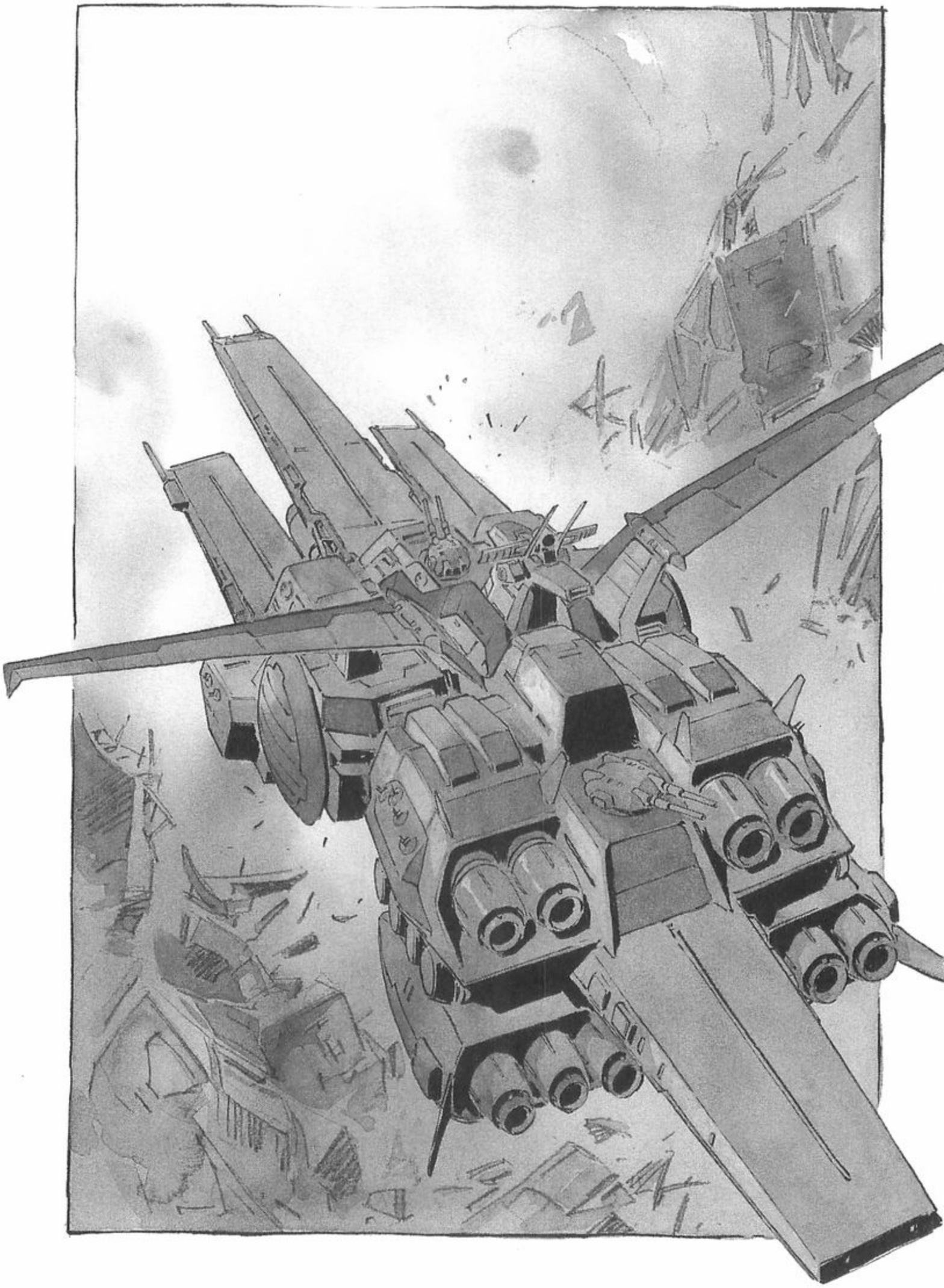
Even so, production of long-ranged missiles had never ceased even till this point, and the missiles viewed as important armaments for navigating ships. The concept was similar to the cavalry battles of the old ages, where throwing weapons were often viewed as treasures. Even though they could not use radar navigation to do precision attacks, the missiles would fly right at the targets once they caught sight of the enemy's locations and determine the course for impact. The missiles, if used with conjunction with the rockets that could not be controlled when fired, would be very threatening in terms of distance and destructiveness. In particular, two direct hits from large anti-ship missiles could sink a battleship.

At this point, these anti-ship long-ranged missiles passed through the shoal space region and hit the debris of the colony where the Nahel Argama was hiding in. based on initial

observations and the L1 basic coordinates that were derived after some time, it showed that 12 missiles were shot out from a Rewloola-class. 4 missed their target, while the remaining 8 hit the outer wall of the of the old colony debris, igniting the explosives that were filled within.

Blueish-white flashes continued to appear and expand, each expanding as the impacts collided with eac other. The 8 fireballs converged with each other, covering the debris of the colony. The supersonic impact caused the outer wall to be partially shed off, and the massive heat melted the materials. The common drainage built underneath were ripped apart, and the energy that crushed the buried dirt to break through the other debris, spurting through the inner walls.

The debris field had still had artificial land mass since the War before, and for a moment, looked to be surrounded by smoke. It was an impact tremor that could be felt from right below, as the dust that was on the building or ground—small particles that piled up after many years of floating in space—danced around. Also, the flash that appeared from underground was leaked out through the gaps of the earth plates, showing a chessboard-like network that spanned 1km of debris. Red flames shot out a second later like lava flowing, eroding the debris in the vacuum, and depicting the scene of uprooting perfectly.



The Nahel Argama had kept its scout camera ball, which was used for outside surveillance, back in, and intended to leave the debris. This was a shocking thing to them. The scout camera ball was a complex sensor that was operated through long cables, and was originally tossed outside amidst the debris to act as a coordinate where the ship could see its blind spot. The Nahel Argama kept it to move, and basically lost its eyes that could see what was going on inside the debris for the time being, while the missiles seemed to rush here at this precise moment.

The debris that was floating in the silence of vacuum suddenly corroded, causing a large amount of debris that flew to hit the bottom of the Nahel Argama, and the uprooted street lights and half-wrecked electric cars hit the ship directly with blazing trails. The giant ship that was almost 400m long was obvious shaken as all the items that were not fastened within the ship were all flying. The crew started bouncing several times between the ceiling and the floor. The gravity block was no exception as Banagher and the dining tray were sent flying, Takuya and Micott slammed into the wall, and Audrey held onto the foot of the table. Mihiro beside them took the internal phone of the recreation room, but was knocked together with the receiver into the air by the continuous shaking. Banagher grabbed onto Mihiro's waist to catch her, and both of them slammed together into the monitor panel on the wall.

Daguza was slammed into the ceiling of the corridor, while Alberto was curled up like a ball as he fell in the room he made his own. The cranes and the frames let out metallic cries that sounded like they were going to snap. Gibney and the other maintenance soldiers were moving all over the place in response to this. Norm,

Riddhe and the other pilots leapt into their own cockpits. There were equipment that could not be used, starting with the anti-air machine guns that took direct damage from the debris, but the bridge had to confirm the damage of the ship later. They were already on standby, but First Officer Liam and the others who had not put on normal suits were thrown off the chairs. Captain Otto ended up having his head crash into the ceiling.

Cries and grunts caused the cries and all the noise to be messed up within his skull that was numb with pain. The scolding hot debris grazed past the front window of the bridge, and numerous red vestiges entered their eyes. It looked like the top of an erupting volcano—

"ENGINE ACCELERATE! EMERGENCY RETREAT!"

Liam finally managed to sit back in her chair and shouted out this command without waiting for the captain to make a decision. The steering crew member recited the order and turned the steering wheel into the designated direction. The bow of the Nahel Argama lifted by almost 90 degrees, and Otto, who saw that the ship was heading up through the colony debris, recognized Liam's immediate decision in this situation. He also had the thought of accelerating forward to escape, but the rubble was scattering, and they were trying to limit the hit area to the smallest possible. The Nahel Argama left the colony debris and managed to escape with the scattered debris hitting the stern of the ship.

"CHECK THE NUMBER OF CASUALITIES! HURRY! WHAT'S THE AIR SURVEILLANCE DOING!?"

Otto shook off the heavy impact his head took as he started yelling. He received the normal suit from the warrant officer waiting on the bridge. “There’s no sign of any enemy around!” The sensor operator’s growl entered Otto’s ears.

“The guess is that the attack came from outside the radar range. ”

“Impossible. Look for it. There’s definitely an enemy disguised as a debris out there nearby.”

Otto slipped his legs into the normal suit and pulled the zip. The sounds of the rubble hitting the ship could still be heard. The remains of the colony below them were gradually crumbling as he saw the saw of it scattering everywhere through the monitor. He then turned his eyes on the searching sensors located on the left flank of the ship. There were direct hits from the anti-ship missiles—and it was not just 2, 3 hits. There was definitely an enemy ship that fired countless missiles from very close distance. It was less than a minute since they kept the scout camera ball and reduced their detection ability. It was basically impossible for an enemy ship to get close, fire missiles and retreat back outside the radar.

“It’s not guided missiles from the radar era we’re talking about here. It’s impossible for missiles to be so accurate once they’re fired and control is lost, and from that distance too…”

Otto unwittingly said these words, and felt a chill on his back. *An attack from afar. If there are no signs of enemies nearby, this is the only thing we can deduce. If we use outer space as a background, the*

*enemy ship will merely be a speck of dust. There's only one way to shoot from outside the radar range and into a 1km radius full of debris. That will be to deduce the absolute coordinates of the target and clear all obstacles in the way before shooting off all the missiles.*

*That's right. The enemy knows where we are exactly. I carelessly used the main cannon just now because of the trouble with the Salamis-class rubble and revealed our location—*

"We've been had."

Liam, who looked like a bear as she was wearing the normal suit, whispered beside the captain seat. Otto saw the tense look from the side of the First Officer's face and wordlessly looked forward. "High-heat object, closing in rapidly!" Shocked, he lifted his head once he heard the voice of the sensor operator.

"4 targets, coming in from above the ship. Estimated time before reaching, T-minus 3.3"

*It's different from the first wave attack coordinates. We're surrounded.* Otto temporarily left aside this worst case scenario as he asked, " Missiles again!?"

"No, this movement is of a mobile suit, but…"

The stuttering voice showed fear. Otto looked at the back of the sensor operator from behind Liam's shoulder.

"It's unreasonable for it to fly through the debris at such a speed . A unit leading the squad is moving in 3 times faster than the mobile suits behind!"

The sensor operator lifted his head from the control panel, looking rather pale as he turned to the Captain's seat. "What did you say..?" Otto felt his muttering mouth widen as he stared at the sensor image.

The unidentified unit left behind the units at the back as it flickered mysteriously. *It's a completely different unit from the 'Sleeves ' mobile suits before, including that four-winged*—Otto heard his skin give off goosebumps as he unwittingly grabbed onto the armrest of the Captain's seat.

## Part 12

The attacking speed of that red mobile suit was definitely far above the Geara Zulus that were following behind. The high-output thrust unit installed on the back was a reason for this, but that was not all. The red mobile suit was also skilled and stepping on the debris in its course, utilizing superb technique of recoil and thruster jet use to move forward.

The unit immediately floated through the countless metal debris and stone rubble that were far larger, crossing each side, leaping on each debris piece, shot out thruster jets at full power to the next debris piece, and kept going through the shoal space region at this accelerated dash. Of course, the debris would move with the course, so it was not able to gain a proper footing

beforehand. It predicted the course of the debris beforehand, chose the next landing point before having footing, and chose the shortest path to the next target. Even a high-capacity computer would not be able to compute in time, and this was an amazing skill that was like climbing a cliff by jumping off falling rocks. The pilot of the red mobile suit—the "Sinanju" could do it however. The angelic-looking wings of the thruster unit flared as the red mobile suit leapt through the torrent of debris like stepping stones, elegantly dancing through space.

As it moved forward, the colony debris that hid its trails was crushed as a Federation ship emerged from the chaos of debris. The face of the masked pilot wrinkled with a smile as he saw the white ship emerge into the underworld. His hands were wearing thing gloves as he held onto the control sticks, while his feet that were covered with boots stepped on the pedal. The pilot was wearing a crimson red uniform that had gold ornaments, and was not wearing a normal suit.

"Let me see the capabilities of that new model Gundam then!"

The bushy blond hair felt vitalized as it swayed gently in the air . As the "Sinanju" passed through the torrent of debris, Full Frontal chuckled in the cockpit.

# Chapter 3

## Part 1

(The bow will be directed in a new direction. Opening the hatches for the 1st to 4th catapult. Mobile suit squadron, get into launching position.)

The voice of Operator Bellard could be heard as the catapult hatches opened. Riddhe moved the "ReZEL" unit 008 forward, let the machine step on the catapult, and could not help but let out a call of amazement as he looked at the scene outside.

"This is…!?"

The 3rd catapult deck was extend out into the vacuum—if the Nahel Argama's shape could be described as a wooden horse, the right foreleg would be the exposed catapult. A large amount of debris was surrounding them in the midst of the current, as blocks of all sizes floated towards the stern of the ship. Occasionally, debris the size of a mobile suit would graze past the catapult. It felt like swimming in the midst of remains. However, the Nahel Argama itself was moving forward, and the reason why this misassumption would be thought of was because they were leaving the collapsed colony remains, and the scattered rubble flow looked like they were moving from the back to the front.

*If we moved in the same direction as the debris, the relative velocity on both sides will be negated, and the surface area of the ship being hit could be reduced to the smallest possible area. This would be a welcomed*

*arrangement for the mobile suit that would be shot out from the bow, but can we leave the ship safely? If we slam into a debris that comes from behind when we fly out, we'll be squashed immediately…no, before I even worry about that, let's think; how am I going to catch sight of the enemy in this messy space?* Riddhe swallowed his saliva as he looked around the debris that kept floating around. (We chose a very bad time to launch), the voice from the wireless communicator caused him to close his mouth. It was Lieutenant Commader Homare of Romeo 004.

"It's rare that you can remain on standby inside the ship. Is this really alright, young lord?"

"I'm not convinced about letting you guys handle this, Lieutenant Commander."

He answered this dig with a dig back. It was something small, but this small action alone gave him a peace of mind. (Oh, you sure dare to answer back). Riddhe heard the Lieutenant Commander as he felt that he could finally be alone. (That's all for chit-chat). Squad leader Norm's voice interrupted.

(All units are to form elements after leaving the ship. Juliet 2 with Romeo 004. Romeo 008, follow me.)

The element, as its name would imply, was about using the smallest number of members when forming teams, active teams of 2s. Norm was the attack unit, and Riddhe was the defense unit. Thus, Riddhe's unit had a long-distance support beam launcher

equipped. Everyone was launched out, but it was unexpected that they would only have 2 elements. “Understood.” Riddhe suppressed the timidity that crept up in him as he answered.

(There are 4 enemy units closing in. We have similar numbers, so calm down before going.)

Squad Leader Norm seemed to read his thoughts, and behind him (Path clear. Please launch). Operator Bellard’s voice rang. Riddhe stared at the torrent of debris that showed no signs of stopping, and grumbled “What path clear…?”. (I can hear you, Romeo 008!) The Operator’s voice could be heard, causing Riddhe to cringe. “Got it!” Riddhe grumbled in his heart after answering, thinking that it would be great if Mihiro was the operator.

*Looks like she’s still not released from her task to take care of the civilians. Speaking of which, I asked her out to see a movie. What was the type of movie she said she doesn’t really like?* Riddhe thought in an absent-minded manner. He intended to think of that mini-tank’s round eyes in his mind, but suddenly ended up thinking about another pair of eyes, and was shocked by it.

Those emerald-colored eyes that looked like they were about to suck him in; those eyes that did not look like they could relax and look at him, the side of that awe-inspiring face overpowered the rest as it appeared in Riddhe’s mind, causing him to be shaken by the lack of understanding of his mindset. *Why, why am I thinking of her face when I may end up dying—*

“What the heck am I doing? Is it love at first sight?”

He unwittingly said it out. *Are you serious?* Riddhe asked himself. (…Don't say it.) Operator Bellard's seemingly disgusted musing could be heard, "Ah, no, I don't intend that…" Riddhe was frantically trying to explain, but was shut up by a booming voice ( Norm Basilicock, Romeo 001, launching!)

One could see Squad Leader Norm's "ReZEL" unit 1 glide up from the 1st open-air catapult deck that formed the bow of the " Nahel Argama". The "Jegan" unit 2 then shot out from the 4th catapult at the bottom of the ship. Riddhe grabbed onto the control stick. *Let me survive this before thinking about the rest later. I won't die, and I definitely can't die. I must come back and meet Audrey. If I'm really in love, I'll naturally find out where I should go.*

The countdown timer display reached zero. *That's right, I'll definitely survive.* Riddhe muttered in his own heart as he got ready to launch. At this moment, he suddenly remembered. *Is that letter to my father sent out yet?*

## Part 2

(Riddhe Marcenas. Romeo 008, launching!)

The vague voice through the wireless speaker rang. "Ah, it's Ensign reading." Banagher heard Takuya say this as he stared at the monitor panel on the wall showing the blue mobile suit with a transformable booster unit on the back glide on the catapult and fly into vacuum.

"Someone you know?"

"It's the Ensign who had the model plane. I never saw him again after this."

The biplane model that was fastened on the table with tape could be seen in the direction Takuya was pointing. That was something Takuya did after managing to hold onto the model tightly in the middle of the tremors, and prevent the same thing from happening. "Oh, that one…" Banagher answered he turned his eyes back to the monitor panel that as 10 inches. *That's the young pilot who was chasing the model on the mobile suit deck. He sure feels like he will doubt easily.* As he thought, Riddhe's machine could be seen flying off, leaving behind the blueish-white thruster jets on the monitor.

That machine dodged the debris surrounding the ship like flowing water, and gradually disappeared from the screen. His movements compared to the previous ones were not lackluster…or rather, it felt like that course he chose was the one that would use less effort. Banagher brought his face closer to the visual presented by the camera that was fastened on the catapult. "You guys can watch this later!" Mihiro growled, causing Banagher to cringe.

"Hurry here and put on the normal suits."

Mihiro carried in 4 normal suits from the locker room and said to them with a sharp voice. She herself was covered in the white military normal suit, and was giving a look of a soldier who would not have time to pretend to be calm in a real battle. "Alright." Banagher answered Mihiro as he looked back at Audrey and Micott.

Both of them had been in 2 corners of the wide room ever since they returned back to the recreational room, and they never intended to look at each other as they silently put on the normal suits even in this situation. The way they deliberately changed into the normal suits while turning their backs on each other gave an ominous vibe. While it was okay on Audrey's side, it would not be weird for Micott to explode anytime soon—

"Try and hold yourself down and don't leave this place. I'm going outside to check on the situation."

Mihiro probably was not in the mood to notice the atmosphere as she hurriedly left the room while being tripped by the trays on the floor. Banagher looked at the normal suits that were left on the table, stared at the backs of the girls who were hesitantly changing, and was really not motivated to go to them as he decided to stay in front of the monitor panel. "Oh, this launched from the 2nd catapult." Takuya switched the channel of the monitor as he mused with fast breathing. Banagher and he watched the back of the transformable mobile suit that got ready to launch.

It was not a misjudgment this time. The ship was attacked by the enemy, and the monitor was showing a real battle. *It's the enemy Neo Zeon. Will that four-winged mobile suit come back again? " Leave this place with me''* Banagher recalled that cold tone as he glanced at Audrey. Her expression was stiff, but there was no sign of anxiety or fear on her face as she inspected the normal suit. It was like the time when they were facing each other in the dim storage room, the stare that refused from thousands of miles away was looking at something other than this place. Those emerald eyes were showing passive thoughts of taking it one thing at a

time, her emotions suppressed by a sense of duty. *The ones attacking may be her allies—*

The reports announcing that they were leaving the ship were buzzing. “Please, you guys…” Banagher was prompted by Takuya ’s earnest voice as he stared at the transformable mobile suit. The giant figure on the catapult deck looked to be smaller, and just when it was about to reach the end of the catapult deck, a pink beam appeared like static, sweeping through the image in a diagonal direction. At that moment, a white light was emitted from the mobile suit that was about to leave the ship, and the monitor suddenly turned black.

The room lost its light at the same time, and the noise of an explosion that rocked the air within the ship surrounded him. The floor was bumped by several meters, and Banagher was knocked into the ceiling for some reason. Amidst the darkness, the cracking sound of something being crushed echoed through the ship; the noises of breaking glass and compressed metal could be heard. Screams and moans echoed through the room. Banagher reached out his outstretched arm, and kept hitting the walls and the floor without grabbing anyone. At this moment, Banagher’s nerves were all numb with pain as he moved his arm, trying to grab something. Suddenly, the emergency red alert flashing in the room dyed the dark room red.

The monitor image was regained, and the visual from the same angle as before was shown on a corner. The image of the catapult deck, stretched into space, was captured by the camera—but the runway that should appear there disappeared. What appeared there was a dark void with debris that were moving in the

opposite direction, shining. The pink beam that flashed again left some burns, and the darkness devoid of stars had two, three lights of explosions.

*We got sniped…?* Banagher stared at this pink beam that was obviously from a mega-particle cannon, took what he deduced and tried to let his aching body stand up. He looked around the room that was surrounded in red light, and checked the locations of the other 3 that were collapsed in the different corners of the room. Audrey was holding onto the holding, kneeling; Takuya had his head stuffed into the flower bed, and Micott, who had her lower body inside the normal suit. Banagher saw that the trio seemed to have escaped fatal injuries, and he was about to move to Audrey who was unable to stand up as a chilling premonition came down his spine without warning.

Something floated past the screen behind him. The red vestige was etched in Banagher's eyes. That was not the vestige of a beam, but something that was with physical mass. This certain thing had enough killing intent to cause goosebumps was closing in on this ship. That thing was giving off a heavy presence, arriving here with killing intent that went through several layers of armor.

Banagher tried to look for the red vestige on the monitor. The meteor-like shadow did not appear again as a new explosion appeared, creating a dazzling white light in the vacuum.

## Part 3

Even though the light filter took effect, the flashes that immediately appeared still dyed the window white, robbing the

bridge members' sighs. Otto collided into the normal suit locker at the back, barely managed to climb onto the captain's seat rest, and shouted with all his strength, "WHAT'S THE SITUATION!?"

"it seems that a "ReZEL" that was launched got sniped. The left catapult deck took severe damage.

Operator Bellard growled back as he gave a brief damage report from the damage control room. The peripheral view of the ship was shown on the monitor panel above his head, and the damaged parts were blinking red. The portside catapult deck of the Nahel Argama was blown to bits as it was caught in the explosion of the sniped ReZEL. It lost the left foreleg of a sphinx. Otto saw that his ship looked like it was half blown off, and felt that what he saw was a moment of darkness. He put on the helmet of his normal suit tightly, and raised his volume, saying, "EVERYONE, CHECK FOR DAMAGES!"

"WHAT'S THE ANTI-AIR DEFENSE DOING! WE GOT AN ENEMY ON US!"

The 2,600 close-ranged defense artillery, and the main cannon that had a further range than the enemy unit had not been fired. " But adjustments aren't…!"Otto angrily told off the cannon operator, who answered with a bone-chilling reply. They were trying to estimate where the enemy unit was, even though at this moment, trying to hold off the enemy with bullets without actually worrying about hitting was common sense in actual battle.

"NOW'S NOT THE TIME TO BE AIMING! KEEP FIRING!"

Otto let out a roar through the wireless network to all the units in the ship. He may have ended up embarrassing the cannon operator, but that was all. Anyone would lose functionality after being trained in precision and competing for it. Otto reflected on the time when he viewed ship efficiency as the most important thing and felt regret over it. at this moment, countless inception fire let out flashes outside the window.

The 60mm machine cannon that was meant to counter mobile suits let out a trail of fire of light bullets. Also, there were 2 main cannons equipped on the ship, one about and one below—the 2 twin-barrel mega-particle beam cannons let out sublight beam bullets. The secondary cannons hidden within the two domes on the flanks shot out beams, and the Nahel Argama shot out a screen of fire all over the place, but this was already a slow reaction. The debris that got hit exploded, and as countless bits of light were flickering around the ship, new direct hits rocked the inside of the ship. Otto got back to the captain's seat, and several seconds later, he was bumped up and knocked into Daguza, who entered the bridge. As Daguza used his injured left arm with the cast on to grab the big man, Otto roared back in a voice loud enough to match the impact noises, "THERE'S ONLY ONE UNIT! KEEP FIRING!"

There was only one enemy that entered the ship's range as the other 3 units were outside the attack range, intending to watch the battle from the sidelines. *What enemies?* Otto lifted his head to look at the monitor image, seeing this before returning back to the captain seat and fastened himself with the attachment at the back. *Our machines that are fighting it can't even match its movements.* The remnant exploded after the direct hit from the beam, spewing hot

debris, and the enemy unit got over to other heat sources to easily get through the fire. Such excellent reflexes—no, this was not a skill a human could pull off. It was like the mobile suit knows all the blind spots of the ship without any data help, dealing damage to the Nahel Argama which lost its foreleg.

"Who in the world is that guy…" As he unwittingly mused, the umpteenth tremor rocked the ship again. The body of the ship was rocked by several meters, and the G-force hit the body that was on the Captain's body. (The rear main cannon took severe damage). Before the voice of the report rang, Daguza muttered, "The enemy doesn't intend to shoot the engine room." Otto opened his closed eyes. Daguza grabbed onto the captain seat's armrest, his helmet reflecting the explosions of light outside.

"That guy wants to neutralize us before taking the Box."

Daguza did not look away from the window. *The enemy's trying to wear down our ship's fighting strength to make us surrender while avoiding damage on the engine room that may sink the ship. That's the kind o enemy we're facing.* Otto felt his face turn pale, and argued back, "Idiot, how can such a stupid thing happen! We're talking about a single mobile suit trying to do this…!" He then caught sight of Alberto, who rushed into the bridge, from the corner of his eye. "Mr Alberto, this place is dangerous!" He ignored Liam's warning that was earlier than Otto's, and pulled the chair of the sensor. He handed a record card to the sensor operator and turned to Otto, saying, "Use the data inside to check." Otto was overwhelmed by Alberto's massive killing intent…or rather, thoroughly fearful face as he gave an expression allowing them to do so. The sensor operator then took the record card he received

and put it into the console's slot. Soon, the data that was read was shown on the sensor visual, and it started matching with the unidentified machine they were fighting.

In less than two seconds, a match was indicated, and the photo of the unidentified mobile suit was displayed through CG hologram. The 3-dimensional picture and the data was shown. Otto silently watched the sensor image. It was a mobile suit that had the smart body line of a Federation unit and also the curves of a Zeon-type mobile suit. It had a one-eyed head, a thruster unit on the back that looked like wings, and the machine was a dazzling red—

"So it's the "Sinanju". The enemy's the "Red Comet" here…"

Alberto backed away from the console and muttered with a trembling voice. Otto felt the wavering air of uneasiness inside the bridge, and parroted back, "The Red Comet…?"

"It was two year ago. Our company developed a prototype mobile suit that was robbed by those guys during transport." Alberto's eyes could not remain focused as they moved, and he continued, "The Federation units that were sent to track it down came back in defeat, and the one viewed as the mastermind behind it was Full Frontal, that person called the second coming of the Red Comet—Char Aznable."

Liam seemed to be enlightened as she lifted her heavy-looking eyelids and looked over. "I heard of it before. That red mobile suit single-handedly took down two Clop ships, called the pioneer of the "Sleeves."

"That one called "The Lingering Soul of Char" who created a commotion that time, huh? But…"

*Impossible.* No, Otto himself wished that this situation did not happen. The red mobile suit was like a hallucination amidst the flickering explosions of light in space, and Otto clamped his glove that was drenched in sweat. The fallen king of the old Zeon Empire, Char Aznable, took the reins during the second Neo Zeon War as the heir of Zeon Deikun. He was the man at the center of the conflict called "Char's Counterattack". *Even if it were a joke, that Red Comet who vanished without a trace during that final battle could not have survived till now.* Some idiot must have been using Char's name after seeing that he might not have been shot down.

*But if that's the case, what's with the overwhelming prowess of this enemy in front of us—* "The color is different, but this machine is one of the two that were stolen." Alberto's next words caused Otto to swallow his stone-like heavy saliva.

"The RX-0 is designed from this thing's data! This isn't a mobile suit that can be taken down with some half-baked mobile suits! Hurry up and run away!"

Alberto's pale face was dyed with the explosion of light outside the window at the next moment. The blunt and heavy impact pierced through the bridge, and the bodies that were held down by the chair attachments could only shake. Otto grabbed onto Alberto's normal suit just when Alberto was floating around, dragged him to the Captain's seat with all he got, and yelled, " SEND THE RELEVANT DATA TO ALL UNITS!" The echo and

the voices of damage reports rang, and the alarm indicating that the enemy was closing in sounded even more rushed.

"THE ENEMY'S NOT SOME DEAD PERSON OR ANY DAMNED THING! IT'S JUST A MACHINE THAT COMES FROM SOMEWHERE! WE'LL DEFINITELY HIT IT IF WE CALM DOWN AND AIM! TELL THE MOBILE SUIT SQUAD THIS!"

*Even If we want to run away, we'll just be hit from the back in this situation.* Otto fought back the feelings in his heart that were overwhelmed by the term "The Second Coming of Char", and stared at the beams that were all over the place outside. Daguza seemed to have some thought as he passed by Otto, while the explosions showed him leaving the bridge silently.

## Part 4

The combat data was immediately sent out, and the mobile suit squad received this data through the radar. The unknown CG image model was corrected by the data, allowing the pilots to grasp the shape of the enemy mobile suit. However, the situation did not improve in this situation.

Even after knowing the shape, it was meaningless if they could not catch sight of the enemy. The "Sinanju" continued to fly behind the messy debris, not leaving any opening for the Nahel Argama pilots to fight it head on. The red mobile suit grazed past the dead angle—it was too late when everyone realized this, and broke through the defense lines, and shot a new beam at the ship.

The Nahel Argama took a direct hit, giving off a white-hot fireball. The pure white ship that lost its left catapult was tilted largely to the side. The anti-air fire continued on, ripping through the torrent of debris to bits. The red mobile suit, which was not even equipped with a shield, moved in in arcs amidst the numerous explosive lights. The arm that had the logo of Zeon on the sleeve, the legs that looked like some crustacean shell, the two propeller tanks on the back all help guide the Active Mass Balance Auto-Control rotor, allowing the red giant to move amidst the vacuum on its own.

No matter how different the frame or the power generator was, mobile suits of the same size should not have a difference in output. The "Sinanju" continued to toy with ship with hit and run tactics, while the Nahel Argama pilots did not break formation as it insisted on basic tactics and continuous suppression of the enemy. The Lieutenant Commander's Romeo 004 got shot down with the catapult jet, and the remaining forces that were left were 2 "ReZELs" and one "Jegan". These three machines all started to search out the enemy, attack and support, tracking the red machine that was appearing and disappearing in the midst of the torrent of debris. The movement courses of the enemy suit would naturally be limited with the involvement of the Nahel Argama's fire. The pilots believed that they had a chance since there was no attacks from any Psycommu weapons.

The one in charge of tracking down the enemy was the Juliet 2 " Jegan", while the attacker Romeo 001 started to double team it. The defender, Romeo 008, was equipped with a beam rifle as it remained in a position where it could see the three machines. The

3 machines continued to dodge the debris that was moving in from irregular directions as they waited at the opening where the enemy would appear. The enemy's mobile suit had outstanding AMBAC capabilities, but there had to be a limit. They had went through multiple moments when the enemy would dodge attacks that would have normally hit. The Nahel Argama pilots had been waiting for this moment, for several minutes after the Nahel Argama took a direct hit. The "Sinanju" was slowed down a little, perhaps because the debris floated in its path. The pursuing "Jegan " used this chance to rain fire, and the "ReZEL" 011 got right in front of the "Sinanju" before shooting a mega-particle from the beam rifle. The "Sinanju" was restrained by the front as it stopped. Riddhe, who was piloting the "ReZEL" 008, squeezed the trigger.

"Got you!"

The power generator hidden inside the beam rifle roared and shot out a large beam. The mega-particle beam that could match a battleship main cannon blew aside the debris in a straight line, vaporizing through space dust as it rushed at the enemy. However , the "Sinanju" managed to dodge that attack at the critical moment. It was fighting the other two machines, but it could still dodge a sublight beam that came from somewhere else.

The burning debris was scattered all over the lace, having taken the direct hit. The "Sinanju" kicked at one of them and flew through the perimeter at an abnormal speed. The "Sinanju" rained fire on Riddhe's suppressing fire, and then hid its own heat source amongst the hot debris.

The beam rifle lacked a consecutive fire function. It would need ten seconds to recharge for the next shot. Riddhe's "ReZEL" had to back away, and the "Sinanju" snuck below the "Jegan" that was closing in on it. The "Jegan" could not use the heat sensor and rely on the visuals, but the enemy was right below it—the only blind spot of the 360 degrees all view monitor, right below the linear seat .

"Is this guy a Newtype too!?"

*This is an enemy more ferocious than the psycommu equipped 4-winged, and without openings.* The voice of the "Jegan" pilot was drowned out by Squad Leader Norm's voice "Right below!". The " Jegan" pilot wanted to step on the pedal, but the beam rifle in the " Sinanju"s hand let out a flash, and the pilot's consciousness faded.

The beams came out from the rifle barrel, obliterating the " Jegan" from the bottom in rapid-fire mode beams. One hit the leg, another crushed the hand, and the "Jegan" limbs that were hit seemed to dance in space like a spoilt puppet. The head was crushed by the internal pressure, and the core reactor was ignited. The armor let out hot air, and the shockwave ripped through the metal skeleton inside as the now deformed machine was swallowed in an extremely hot ball of light.

The light of explosion that expanded lit up the surrounding debris, causing the "Sinanju" red frame to float in mid-air. It easily dodged pasted Norm's shots and again vanished amongst the torrent of debris. Norm could not help but have goosebumps as his impression of other unique mobile suits he saw on the battlefield

before was mixed in. The “Zeong” and the “Sazabi”, the machines that were piloted by the legendary Red Comet—

“Is that the real Char…!?”

He felt tense after feeling that similar pressure. The Nahel Argama let out flares of being hit behind the two “ReZELs” that were trying to regroup.

## Part 5

The light of explosions that happened more than 60km away looked like light-colored illumination. The cold flashes that were sharper than the stars appeared for a short moment, causing the debris floating around the shoal space region to appear for the time being. The thin thread-like lights passed by, and the bright pink light that cut through the blueish-white ring of light was shot through, followed by an expanding orange fireball that signaled an enemy mobile suit’s explosion.

“I said it before, didn’t I? There’s no need for us to get involved. ”

*It’s impossible to see such a beautiful scene anywhere else.* Angelo Sauper said as he saw the image of this light feast from the all view monitor. Ensign Sergi, who was approximately a kilometer away, twitched the “Geara Zulu” slightly as he watched the battle with the rest of the escort squad, answering somewhat hesitantly, (Yes …)

(But is this really okay? There's not just one enemy there. We should be giving covering fire, shouldn't we…?)

"That'll just be a nuisance. We just need to stay here and clean up any enemies the Captain missed."

*Even so, there're only two enemy suits left. There's no room for the escort squad to intervene here.* Angelo raised the long-distance beam launcher that was equipped on the right manipulator, and rested the 20m long weapon on the machine's shoulder. Angelo got rid of the instantaneous fire mode, intending to watch the battle from afar, and wryly added, "But the Captain sure is evil for not leaving such small work to us."

"I never squeezed the trigger once ever since I followed the Captain into the battlefield."

(Not even once…?)

Sergi's mobile suit on the enlarged image of the window moved its monoeye to look at Angelo, seemingly looking for an expression or so. Angelo looked at Lieutenant Cuarón in the opposite direction and saw that he was intending to just watch as he put the cannon on his shoulder. Angelo answered 'yeah' as he put his hand on the helmet.

"I feel that this is an honor of us, the Escort Squad."

Angelo took off the helmet and lifted the bangs on his forehand. Angelo himself thought that this was too much, but he did not care

about it any further. At this distance, the beam that would be fired here would either be a ship cannon or a high-energy launcher cannon. It would be instant death if any of them were hit. Sergi's machine showed a puzzled attitude as it turned its monoeye back to the front to stare at the battlefield again. Angelo looked over from the corner of his eye and continued in his heart: *You'll understand later.*

*There won't be any wild enemy shots flying over. The enemy's head over heels trying to set a firing range. Anyone who's trying to snipe us from that will be taken down by the Captain if there are any signs of it. Someone might think that there's no need for an escort squad, but that's not true. There are many things we can do to help the Captain, like protecting the battlefield the Captain is on, or watching out for any reinforcements. It's this feeling of trusting and being trusted that allows us to be able to deal with any enemy more than anything else. The Captain himself acknowledged that we're the fighting strength supporting him on the battlefield.*

*Leaving our lives to each other and gaining unsurpassed happiness and absent-mindedness is more precious than anything else* Angelo imagined seeing the "Sinanju" in the midst of the crossfire of beams. *The enemy mobile suits will be immediately dealt with, the ship cannon will be taken down. The enemy ship will have nowhere to go, and they have to hand over the Laplace Box soon. No matter what it is, it'll definitely big enough for the ship to hold. Once we reclaim it, we'll just put it back on the "Rewloola" at the back.*

*I can still enjoy this numbing and enjoyable feeling before then. Everything about the battlefield the Red Comet rides on—Full Frontal, is*

*pretty.* There is a large ball of explosion shown there, and Angelo muttered: *I'll enjoy this even if I die.*

## Part 6

The umpteenth impact rocked the ship, and Banagher grabbed onto the foot of the table that was creaking. The falling rocks-like noises rang, and the sounds of floating bodies crashing the floor could be heard as the red lights shining inside the room flashed brightly.

(Third Ventral Fin on the right took heavy damage!)

(Emergency response team, hurry up with the airtight assignment on C block!)

(It's the 4th VLS! A missile fell in from the suspension and we got a staff crushed down there…! OI! KIKUMASA, KIKUMASA!!)

What could only be heard from the open speakers in the ship were cries and roars. "Is this ship…going to be alright…" Takuya muttered, and Banagher did not rely as he looked around the recreational room that was covered with a thin amount of dust. All the things that were not held down were scattered all over the place, and the monitor panel on the wall was showing cracks. He spent all his concentration on guarding himself against the tremors . He and everyone else had not put on their normal suit. Micott was grabbing onto the sofa, not moving at all, and on the opposite side, Banagher saw that Audrey was intending to carry the

spacesuit. He intended to move there when the tremors stopped. It was unknown when the airtight wall would be broken through if this kept up. They had to make sure they had their air.

Banagher gathered up 2 normal suits that were scattered tucked them under his armpits. His eyes met Audrey as she was doing the same thing, and he felt a very suffocating feeling. The shocks that happened next forcefully made them look away from each other. It seemed that the fixators were spoilt as the flower pots were tumbled, the dirt and the lids that was pried open by the shock landed on the floor, and the bits of dirt were scattered on the floor. Banagher's vision was blocked by the dirt that went flying with the impact again, and shouted, "HURRY UP AND PUT THE NORMAL SUITS UP!"

Micott lifted her head from the sofa, and Takuya snuck out from the back of the table. Banagher saw that Audrey was going over to Micott, and intended to move over to Takuya as he heard the sound of the door being opened behind.

He looked back, and saw two men walking into the room silently. Both men wear wearing deep beige spacesuits that were sticking onto themselves, while their right legs had gun holsters. Banagher was shocked that the two men were wearing different clothing from the ship's crew for a short moment, only to realize that the face under the helmet was a familiar one as he shut his mouth that was about to open after being suppressed by that sharp stare.

Daguza's eyes did not show any signs of cordial he had with others for a moment before. The knife-like stare in the eyes

stopped Banagher's movements, just like the first time they met in this room. During this time, the other hulking man grabbed Audrey's upper man.

That person intended to bring Audrey right in front of Daguza as he pulled her with enough force that did not allow for any arguments back. "What are you…!" Audrey groaned as she wanted to shake off the hand, but her face could not be seen as her left arm was held down by Daguza's left arm. Banagher was shocked for several seconds and hurriedly tried to get in front of Daguza, only to be immediately stopped by the hulking man in front of him.

Banagher could see the side of Audrey's face behind the hulking man's back that she was listening to Daguza whispering. He saw her shocked expression, and all signs of resistance on her immediately vanished as she looked at Daguza with a silent expression. Daguza looked back at Audrey's angry or remorseful look, while Banagher did not know what was going on as he could only watching their faces. Daguza ignored him as he had his arm around Audrey before stepping out. Audrey moved the arm that touched her away and went towards the door on her own.

"Excuse me…" Micott spoke up with a barely audible voice. Daguza stopped to glance at her, and then looked away to continue walking. Banagher saw Micott lowly her pale face, and turned his eyes back at Daguza, who was passing through the door with Audrey and shouted, "Wait!"

"Why are you doing this? Where are you intending to bring Audrey to?"

Daguza merely glanced behind, not even saying anything. He nudged Audrey on the back lightly just when she was about to stop, and both of them continued to move forward. Banagher's head immediately felt hot as he stamped on the floor.

"Wait…!" Banagher angrily reached his arm out to grab Daguza 's waist, and for a short moment, thought that his fingers reached the normal suit. Daguza nimbly reached his right arm out to push Banagher's forehead, and the force that pushed him back practically sent him sprawling.

"Do not leave this place until you're order to. Got it?'

The hulking man said. Banagher saw his somewhat guilty looking expression as he looked back and used his hand to feel the hand to feel the head that took heavy damage. The closed door had already blocked any sight of Daguza and the rest. Banagher, Takuya and Micott were the only three left inside the room. The tremors that rocked again caused the silent uneasiness to be broken up.

*What the heck was that?* Banagher could not comprehend immediately and only intended to chase after them, only to feel a chill when he heard the words "It's about that girl." Micott's hands that were holding onto Haro tensed up as she stared at the floor with a depressed look.

"It wouldn't be like this if that girl wasn't around…"

Haro fell off from her hands as her knees collapsed weakly onto the floor. Banagher could only feel the anxiety and regret choking

him as he saw Micott collapse like that. “You said it out…?” Banagher squeezed out these words as he grabbed Micott, who lowered her head dejectedly, with both hands.

“WHAT DID YOU SAY!? WHAT DID YOU TELL THEM!?”

“I TOLD THEM THE TRUTH! I TOLD THEM THERE WASN’T SUCH A GIRL IN INDUSTRIAL 7. I TOLD THEM THAT SHE MIGHT BE WORKING WITH THE TERRORISTS…!”

Micott yelled as she lifted her head. Banagher felt even more hurt by her teary eyes that made her look like she was going to collapse, rather than the words themselves. He let go of the hands that were grabbing Micott’s shoulders. *I have no right to tell her off. Everything was all because of me.* He tried to accept this unacceptable truth and vented all his uncontainable rage into his clenched fists. Banagher subconsciously head for the door.

Takuya picked up Haro which dropped on the floor and gave him a wavering stare. *This is a path of no return.* Banagher remembered these words that appeared in his mind and passed through the automatic door. “Don’t go!” A voice that was like a cry came, and at this moment, a soft feeling surrounded Banagher’ s waist.

“You can’t go…stay here.”

Banagher could not look down at Micott’s expression as she wrapped her arms around his waist with her face on his face. He was shocked by this unexpected heaviness, could not move his legs and held his breath as he touched Micott’s hands. He avoided

the normal biological reaction to this warmth and softness, felt this sense of guilt he had never felt before, and gently opened the hands that gave him warmth.

"…I'm sorry."

Banagher had nothing else to say as he stepped on the floor while the tremors rocked his footsteps. He ran past the arc shaped corridor and left the recreational room without looking back. " WHY ARE YOU APOLOGIZING!?" such a cry of anguish could be heard, seemingly piercing through Banagher's heart from the back.

## Part 7

The charge countdown showed 0, and the signal indicating that the charge was done rang inside the cockpit as Riddhe cocked the trigger of the beam launcher to the bottom.

"Go!"

The mega-particles were released as they went through the accelerated convergent ring. The pink beam ripped through the vacuum as they broke past the debris and flew towards the target. However, Riddhe did not have time to check whether it hit the target as he use the thruster jets to help him escape before the recoil from the firing stopped.

On the battlefield, stillness meant death. Shooting out this beam would be the same as telling the enemy one's own location. Besides, the enemy was the "Red Comet" who decimated the defenses of the Nahel Argama alone. Even if it were the real Char,

the fact was that it was an abnormal enemy they were dealing with after a few minutes of skirmish. Riddhe read the radar signal from Norm's unit, and let his unit move around in a messy accelerated trajectory as it flew through the sea of debris. At this moment, the beam came from a completely unexpected direction, and the flash and the intense hit struck the cockpit of the "ReZEL" 008.

The noticeable G force slammed the body, and the attachment gear at the back let out a creaking sound. Riddhe thought that his eyeballs were popping out as he unknowingly put his hand on the helmet. He caught sight of a spark flying from afar as he spun. The fatal G-force faded off by the time he realized that it was his suit's right leg that was blown off by a beam, and he barely managed to let the one-legged mobile suit steady itself.

The functionality of the AMBAC was decreased by 26%. Riddhe glanced aside to look at this status that was explained mercilessly and stepped on the pedal. That red mobile suit was basically fighting multiple enemies by looking at the situation. He would not carry out unnecessary actions, and he was basically treating the debris and the enemy units as a hostage. He did not personally make the kill, but stopped attacking so that he would not focus on just one enemy. Riddhe would definitely be eliminated if he let his unit with lowered mobility stay at its position.

*Newtype, experienced pilot, no, these aren't it. He's an expert.* This simple term appeared in Riddhe's mind as he felt the strength supporting him weakening. That mobile suit shook off Norm's pursuit as it closed in on the Nahel Argama again. The ship was

wrecked by countless hit and run attacks, and the screen of bullets it let out was less than two-thirds the usual. *How are we going to stop that guy with just two units—?*

"If this keeps up, everyone will…"

Riddhe unwittingly said as he gritted his teeth. He worked his mind that seemed to be covered in cowardice as he held onto the control stick again, only to hear a voice from the wireless radio (Do you hear me, the attacking enemy unit there?)

(Cease your attacks immediately. Our ship has captured the prisoner Mineva Zabi. I repeat, our ship has captured the sole heir of the Zabi family, Mineva Lao Zabi.)

The broadcast was made through the open channel frequency—but it was not the voice of the Operator or the Captain. "Who's that…?" Riddhe mused inadvertently as he looked through the monitor at the Nahel Argama. The pure white ship that was firing on the monitor on the far end where the debris continued to swim through, and it was as big as a little finger. (The image will be shown on Channel 582. I hope you can confirm it.) The voice from the wireless radio overlapped with the image. Riddhe, who was looking for the enemy, let his eyes stare at the monitor as he set the wireless frequency to 582. The communication window then showed the face he was familiar with.

Riddhe's heart raced as the hand holding onto the control stick trembled. Prisoner, Zabi Family, Mineva. These terms brought an onrushing surge of hues in his mind as they exploded. The face of

the girl entering his eyes started to shake violently. His lips were sealed tightly as he stared at the emerald eyes who were not wavering. That face yesterday gave him the courage to deal with the situation fearlessly when it entered his stare—

(If you do not cease your attacks, we will not guarantee the safety of Mineva Zabi. We have already prepared terms of negotiations, and we hope for your reply.)

The voice continued through the wireless radio. Mineva Lao Zabi, the sole daughter of the Zabi family who led the Republic of Zeon under Zeon's name. She took the throne during the First Neo Zeon War at a tender age of 7, but disappeared after the war. There were rampant rumors of her death, but the government continued to search for this princess of the fallen empire secretly. *The rumors also said that she was the star leading the Zeon remnants, the "Sleeves"…it's this girl?*

Riddhe could not understand. *Her name's Audrey, I definitely may have fallen for her on first sight.* Riddhe stared at the girl on the window, repeated the name Mineva Zabi that had nothing to do with him, and held his breath because of the image that was captured from the far end. The fire that blazed suddenly stopped as the Nahel Argama's rain of fire stopped.

Riddhe did not know the whereabouts of the red enemy suit, but there were no signs of new beams or thruster jets. It was obvious that this message reached the enemy unit and stopped the attack. (This is Romeo 001. Will the bridge please explain the situation?) Riddhe left side Norm's suppressed call as he stared at Audrey Burne's eyes. She showed no signs of fear nor doubt as her

emerald eyes continued to look forward, still giving off the awe-inspiring look through the window.

"Mineva Zabi…she's, the princess of Zeon?"

The girl on the image remained silent, and the bridge made no response to Norm's unit. Riddhe floated around this battlefield where time had stopped, not knowing what to think

## Part 8

(I've checked the footage.)

The clear and cool voice echoed through the ship, causing everyone in the bridge to jerk. Otto saw Operator Bradley turn around to nod, used his eyes to tell him to maintain this line, and heard the voice of the pilot he was hearing for the first time.

(I am Captain Full Frontal of Neo Zeon. Let me hear your request.)

The communication channel was not too bad as Minovsky Particles were not scattered. It naturally felt like the voice that had been heard many times through news or military footage—the voice of Char Aznable, and Otto held onto the handle of the Captain's seat as he muttered, "So even the voice is the same…?" as he turned his eyes around to see the bridge that was only left with emptiness and cold chatter, raning from Liam, who showed heavy anxiety in her eyes as she got up from the First Officer seat at the console, to the steering crew member and the weapons operator. Alberto held onto the empty command seat right beside

the Captain's seat, his fat face shuddering as he widened his eyes in shock as he stared at the communication panel. Operator Bellard was sitting there, and the girl wearing the purple shawl was standing silently between Commander Daguza, who was wearing a deep beige norm normal and his assistant Officer, Lieutenant Commander Conroy—her body half-blocked by them.

The girl had been mistaken for an ordinary civilian ever since she was taken in from Industrial 7 due to lack of chances to meet directly. She closed her lips, her clear green eyes were focused on a single point, and the expression could be seen through the server monitor. She did not even show any signs of anger on her shoulders, let alone fear in this environment that felt like it was going to be an electric jolt whenever she touched. She was definitely not a citizen that could be randomly seen, Otto admitted. She had a certain special thing about it. Perhaps it was the thick sense of self-pride, or some unique trait that she was born with or raised to have. If she were the descendent of the family that ruled Zeon, this would explain why people would recognize this…

But why, why was she on this ship? Daguza, who barged into the bridge in the midst of the chaotic battle, just took control of the communications panel like a robber and did not even make a single explanation. The enemy had already responded to their calls , and they could not call in the guards to whisk Daguza out. Otto stared at the back of the girl in a nightmare-like state. "We hope that you will cease your attacks and retreat immediately." Daguza spoke into the mic as everyone stared at him in a terrified manner. Conroy put his hand on the handgun holster in the meantime to scare off Liam, who was trying to get up

"We can guarantee Mineva Zabi's safety like this."

(You're not handing her over to us?)

"You can assume that there is still room for negotiations. However, we will like to add an extra condition, and that is that this ship has to be moved to what can be deemed a safe place."

(I see. So she's not a prisoner, but a hostage?)

The red mobile suit's pilot—Full Frontal spoke with a sneer, causing Daguza, who was holding onto the microphone, to show signs of tension on the side of his face. Otto saw the stare from aside, and seemed to recover as he looked back at Liam. He put his helmet with hers while not making a noise. "Are you checking on where the electric signal is coming from?" Otto whispered. Liam looked up at the sensor screen and answered,

"We detected the location, but with so many debris…"

"It's impossible to snipe, right…?"

*The plan was to use the communication panel to grab attention and strike when the enemy stops, but it seems like Daguza's plan was read by the enemy earlier.* Otto stared at the main screen that showed the countless debris hiding the enemy's mobile suit, and then felt a chill when he heard Frontal's voice (There are too many uncertain factors if we want to consider this a negotiation.)

(There is no evidence to prove that the image is showing Her Highness Mineva herself.)

"If you are suspicious, how about you come onto our ship to see for yourself?"

(That is a way. But in that case, I will like to ask your ship to move along with us until our side feels that it is a safe place.)

Frontal said with a calm voice. *He doesn't play along with the opponent's rules and makes up words that will ensure that things go his way when there's an opening. What a smart man.* Otto thought. *Leaving aside whether he's the real Char, this man knows very well how this game called negotiations is done.* Daguza seemed to have the same feeling as he showed some signs of anxiousness on the side of his face as he answered, "You're really cautious for a man called the Second Coming of the Red Comet!"

(Our side is deemed by yours as a terrorist organization. We'll naturally be timid if we aren't accepted as an army, or when the international laws aren't suited for us.)

"We'll respect human rights."

(Nobody will bother hearing that from the Special Forces who were deployed to a civilian colony. Besides, you are talking while holding a hostage.)

They were caught in his flow. Frontal did not let Daguza go with his speechlessness as he continued with a steady voice, (Then, our side will raise a request).

(Our side hopes that you will hand over the item you confiscated from the “Magallanica”, and all the relevant data regarding the Laplace Box.)

Alberto, who was clinging onto the Commander’s seat, bent himself forward. As everyone held their breaths, Daguza asked, “ The price?”

(The journey back will be safe. I wonder if you will believe it?)

“I can’t say that I don’t believe you, but I can’t do so. Our side doesn’t have the thing called the Laplace Box.”

(Your ship should have already reclaimed a Gundam-type mobile suit.)

“That is a Federation property. It has nothing to do with the “ Box”.”

(Our side will determine this. If you can’t accept this request, your ship will be sunk.)

The voice that seemed to express something that was not a threat, but a fact, struck as a gust that froze the air in the bridge. Daguza ignored everyone’s pale faces as he said, “Are you going to ignore the prisoner’s life?”

(I said that I can’t verify that it is Her Highness Mineva herself. I don’t have to reply to any negotiations with uncertain terms.)

Frontal answered calmly. He raised his jaw silently, seemingly ignoring the girl who closed her eyes while seemingly indulging in emotions as he coolly answered through the wireless radio, (I'll give you 3 minutes to consider.)

(Once this time is up, and if I don't get a beneficial reply, our side will sink your ship. I hope you can make a wise decision.)

The electronic broadcast was interrupted before Daguza could answer. Daguza spaced out as he held onto the microphone, while the girl lowered her speechless face. At that short moment, nobody intended to speak up as the bitter silent time descended upon the ship.

They had to break up this silence in order to accept this situation and try to neutralize it…but how were supposed to accept this situation? The enemy called the Second Coming of Char, the girl called Mineva; there were too many factors with unknown reliabilities. The only thing certain as of this point was that their current fighting strength would not be able to match the enemy. Even if they wanted to stall the negotiations, they had no idea of the true identity of the Laplace Box either.

Otto also did think of simply granting the enemy their request, to hand over the mobile suit they had no idea of. But he could not let himself agree with this. He was a Federation soldier, a captain who did not want any of his subordinates to die more than anyone …*however, would this wishful thinking show the incompetence of a commander? Who has the right to force 300 passengers to die with you just to hide a secret with an unknown truth*— Otto stared at Daguza's

back as he forgot to wipe the sweat off his face. “This is a bluff.” The ECOAS commander grabbed onto the microphone so tightly he was seemingly going to break it as he looked at Otto before glancing aside.

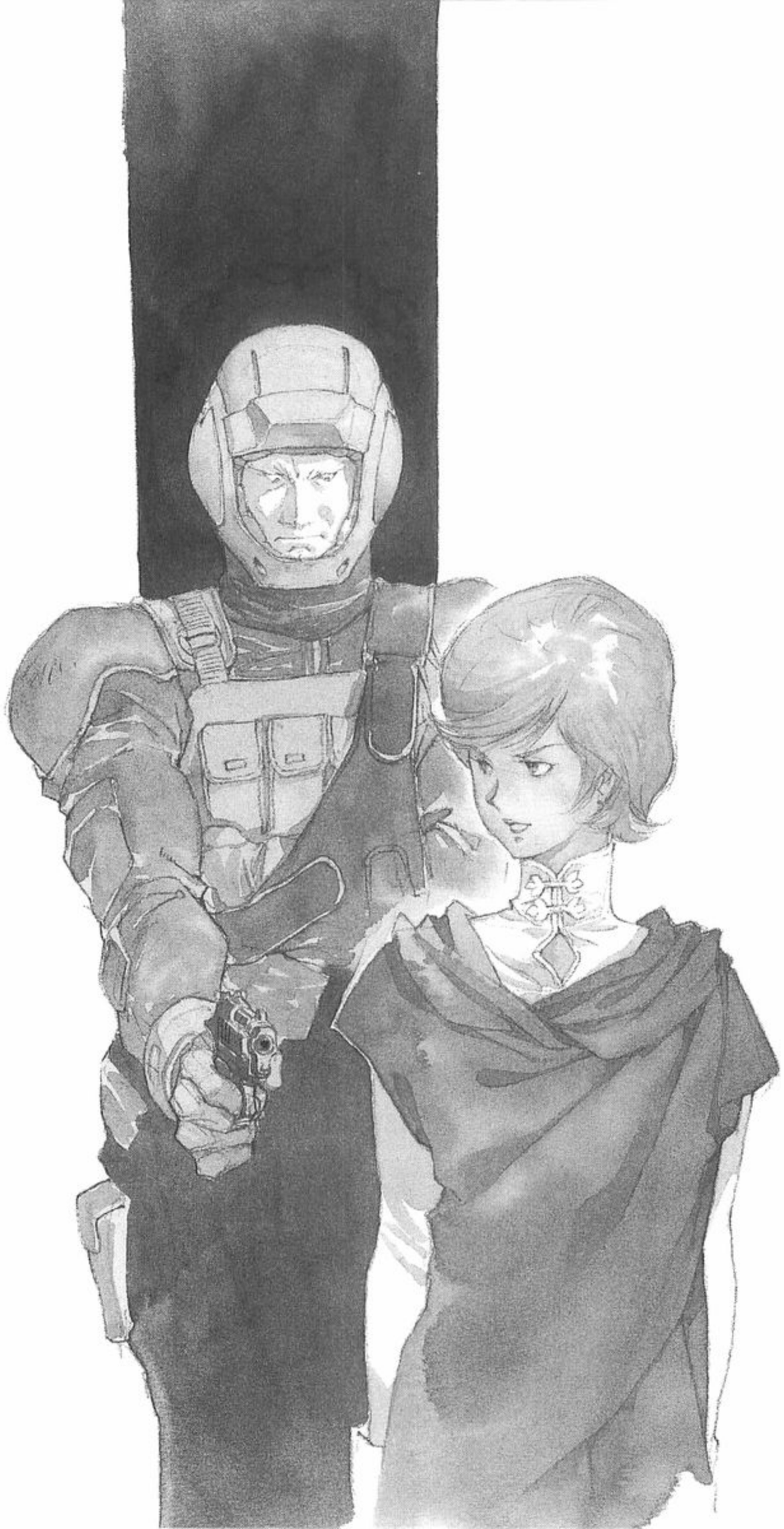
“There’s no reason why they would not come to save the guiding star for the Zeon remnants.”

“Not really.”

Daguza swallowed the words he was going to say next, probably because of the girl Mineva’s unexpected words. The still air spread around like a ripple as everyone in the bridge looked over at her.

“Full Frontal is the man who they say may be Char, the orphaned son of Zeon Deikun. There’s no reason for him to risk his life for the Zabi family, the enemy of his parents.”

The girl, who may be Mineva, ignored the stares of the group around her as she did not show any signs of wavering on her fact. Daguza showed that he was overwhelmed by this presence for a short moment of time as he answered, “These words show that you’re Mineva Zabi herself!” and threw aside the microphone to draw a M-92F automatic handgun from his holster. He pointed the gun at the girl’s temple in front of Operator Bellard, who swallowed his saliva.



"If that were the case, this will be more obvious. It's impossible for Frontal not to save you if he wants the Zabi faction amongst the Sleeves to be obedient."

"If that's what you believe, continue with your useless negotiations. However, the ruler of Zeon isn't as naïve as you think, you know?"

She did not seem concerned with the gun that was pointed at her as her eyes full of will were staring at Daguza. It was a tone that could not be expected, and that stare of hers would make people obey unconditionally; these factors proved her background more than anyone. Otto swallowed his saliva as he stared at this girl that was definitely Mineva Zabi.

"The winner and loser has been decided. Logically, it's a soldier 's duty to minimize our allies' damages before this. If it were a Zeon soldier, he will consider whether to get rid of anything related to the Laplace Box in the meantime."

Daguza's eyes twitched slightly as the hand holding the gun was shuddering slightly. As everyone continued to stare at this unmoved Mineva, Alberto seemed to realize something as he said "That…that's right." And floated over from the commander seat to the duo.

"She's right. Let's destroy the Unicorn's electronic spare parts and hand it over to them. We just need to surrender."

Daguza and Mineva did not move their sights that were staring at each other as Alberto got between them and said,

"That's a key, not the Box itself. If we destroy it, the Box's safety will—"

Daguza clicked his tongue as he looked over at the communications panel. Conroy took action at that moment as he shut Alberto's mouth from behind. Mineva narrowed her eyes too as she stared at the microphone Daguza was holding and the communication panel. They deliberately chose not to cut the line to let the enemy know that they were serious, and in this case, they leaked out information they did not expect.

Conroy put the gun on Alberto's head as he continued to struggle while not knowing what was going on. He saw that no one in the bridge was raising their handguns, and as Liam wanted to take action, his gun was instinctively pointed at her. *Not good*— Conroy showed this expression as he showed no signs of backing down. The crew of the ship showed changes in their expressions. Otto growled for everyone to calm down, only for Mineva to suddenly laugh and sigh.

"This really feels like what the Federation itself will do, but what will you do? Commander Daguza Mackle?"

Mineva gave a wry stare at Daguza and continued,

"If you have the courage, destroy the Box and kill me. Everyone here will die, but it will be a blow to Neo Zeon once they lose the Box and me."

Daguza's forehead was sweating, and Mineva's lips gave a taunting smile.

"Or are you going to let everything get snatched away by not doing anything? You only have a minute left to hesitate."

Daguza took a deep breath through his nose and pointed his gun at Mineva's forehead. The expression on the side of Mineva's face had disappeared as she clenched her fist. *Stop it, don't do anything. this is her plan.* Otto got ready to get up, but was shocked by another voice, "You're talking like that again. That won't do!"

The opened bridge door showed a boy with a bandage on his head. "Why aren't you wearing a normal suit…!" The boy wearing the work jumper got past Liam who said this as she blocked his way and moved to Mineva. He was one of the civilians kept on board—no, the boy who piloted that Gundam. He got to Mineva while getting in the way Daguza in the way Otto thought of.

"Audrey, you're just forcing others and yourself down the path of despair like this. just leave this place."

It was an expression that showed no sight of anything else. The side of Mineva's face that showed no sight of cracking sparkled " Banagher…" as she muttered.

"You shouldn't be involved in these things. Stay with us."

Banagher grabbed Mineva's hand and intended to leave the scene. Mineva managed to steady her body that was about to be dragged away as she used all her strength to shake off the boy's hand.

"Audrey…!"

"I am Mineva Zabi, not Audrey."

"What are you saying? You're Audrey. Whether you're lying or not, you're Audrey Burne to me."

To her, this may be the first time she got rebutted like this. Mineva gasped as she lowered her head slightly. Daguza told off the boy who intended to grab her hand again, "Stop it!"

"This isn't a time where kids' logic can work. Leave this place."

"You're saying that I'm a kid…then, what's Audrey?"

"She's an important person of Neo Zeon, different from you."

"No way! If I'm a kid, so is Audrey. Is using children as hostages what adults should be doing!?"

The voice that was released from his entire body shut Daguza up as if it was blowing apart the still air. Otto felt that his slow-witted head got hit in the back of the head as he stared at the boy called Banagher. He was shocked by this kid who was younger than him as he stared at the side of his face before looking

away. At that moment, the voice from the wireless radio rang, " Time's up."

(Let me hear your ship's response.)

Everyone stared at the captain, and then at Daguza. Daguza remained silent as he did not move the automatic handgun in his hand. *It's already…not, we never had a choice to begin with.* Otto and Liam nodded at each other, sent messages to every department to continue battle, and again looked at the side of Banagher's face.

*We don't actually have much hope out of this, but amongst these adults who can't move, he's the only one who saw the exit.* This feeling did appear in Otto's heart.

## Part 9

The microphone in the air swayed with the gust blowing from the air conditioner. Daguza had no intent of taking it in his hands. His left hand was held in a cast, and his right hand was holding onto the handgun as he just stood around without doing anything. Something like a handgun here would not be of any use.

Audrey too lowered her head as she remained silent. Banagher looked around this bridge that was not too big, waiting for someone to say something. None of them did, and none of them met Banagher in the eye as they were all focused somewhere else, looking at each other. The only one who met him in the eye was the man sitting on the captain's seat, but he would not answer Banagher's stare. Neither Daguza, Alberto, nor any of the passengers—

*Why aren't you doing anything? Why are you still remaining silent? What's with this burdensome silence waiting for someone else to speak up ?* As Banagher thought about this, he looked back at Audrey, and the voice from the wireless communicator declared, (I understand. )

(Our side will sink your ship.)

Only these words were said as the line was cut off. After a beat, the man who looked like the captain growled to the entire ship "IT 'S COMING!"

"Anti-air artillery! Mobil suit squadron, intercept on your own."

The hulking female officer grabbed onto the console and started giving instructions to each department. The remaining crew all got to their stations as the bridge got buzzing. Once the unique cogs started to spin, they will unite to cause the large structure to work — however, they would not start or stop on their own. Banagher had his hand on the back of the operator's seat, taken aback by the buzzing that was completely different from before, and let his listless stare reach the window in front of him. *Soldiering is a job too.* Banagher had such a thought in his mind again as he asked himself, *What should I do?*

Soldiers had different duties like those workers in a factory, and even the captain was one of these cogs. This ship, the Nahel Argama, was a gear of a large organization called the army. If that were the case, what would be the thing moving the cogs? The Generals? The Prime Minister of the Federation government? Or

Anaheim Electronics? No, Alberto would be fulfilling the role of a cog, and he gave the vibe that he had no right to make decisions. Even the important person to Neo Zeon, Audrey, could not say what she wanted to say because of her own predicament, so it may be that all the higher-ups were the same. If everyone was an individual cog that feared the Laplace Box, who would be the person who wanted to protect it even if it meant using a hostage? Would that mean that this thing called an organization itself had a will that demanded humans to obey?

The beams continued to fly outside the window, and the explosions of debris lit the bridge. *This is too stupid.* Banagher silently stared at Daguza as the captain and everyone were growling and giving commands all over the place, and yelled, " CAN'T YOU JUST GIVE THE BOX AWAY!?"

Audrey lifted her head. If Neo Zeon got hold of the Laplace Box , there would be another great war—that may be the case. But so what? Nobody knew its true identity, and there was no certain proof that Audrey's worry would become reality. "If you want everyone to die over something you don't even know what it is—" Banagher emphasized, "Then, can you bear responsibility?" Daguza felt stiff as he opened his mouth, and could not say what he wanted to say.

"If in the end, the power hidden in the Box is something like that, and if it ends up killing more people, how are you going to apologize to the dead and their relatives? How do you intend to compensate them?"

A jolt happened below their feet as Banagher's soles floated away from the floor. The beams continued to fly outside the window, and the expanding lights of explosions lit half of Daguza's face. He looked away from the silent Banagher and said to the subordinate beside him "Keep calling the enemy" and wielded his handgun. The subordinate who had the size of a wrestler looked like he recovered and nodded as he grabbed the microphone floating in the air.

"Cease your attacks, or Mineva Zabi will be executed. This isn't a threat."

The sound of the impact overwhelmed the stiff voice as sirens and damage reports roared all over the place. The subordinate continued to call the enemy, and Daguza, who had his gun pointed at Aurey, had no expectations of what this would do. The captain and everyone else who were focused on the battle in front of them continued to attacking while ignoring their own hostage, just fulfilling the roles that were decided for them. They all responded with the tasks they were given, the fixed roles, options—other options would appear if they had only changed their perspective a little, but none of them were willing to move there. The weight of the term called responsibility had sealed off their eyes and mouth just like how it was at this point.

*This is why the adults can't express their true thoughts,* Banagher suddenly thought. *The more they obey their duties, the more they will succumb to their responsibilities, and they will gradually lose sight of everything around it. And once they find a situation where nothing can work, they will push the responsibility onto someone else and remain*

*silent. They shunned the responsibilities by making it rather vague, saying that they had no rights or authority, only caring about what's in front of them and saving themselves. If the world is destroyed before of this, the adults will definitely say that they don't have the power and rights to save the world.*

*If I want to save her, I must have the realization to bear the weight of the world—is this how it is? So these hurdles that obedient people without malice build up are the weight of the world?* Banagher was not hoping for anyone to do anything at this point as he stared at his palm.

The palm that had not fully felt the meaning and pain of work was covered with a mere thin layer of skin. Banagher did not feel this hand could bear the weight of the world, but it could touch Audrey, it could touch her stubborn delicate body and give warmth to her. If this was something Banagher had to do, he would be willing—

"…We just need to hang on through this situation, right?"

Banagher muttered and lifted his head.

"If we take down that red mobile suit, there won't be any need to take Audrey as a hostage, right? I'll do it!"

Banagher glanced aside at the stunned Daguza and turned away. He felt Audrey's stare from behnd him, but if he stopped, he would be unable to move due to fear. Banagher dashed out of the bridge without looking back.

The heat on his body was gathered at his temples. Banagher was driven by a pulsating heat as he undid the bandage on his head and took the elevator down. He put his hand on the inside of the cubicle and pressed the button that led to the mobile suit deck. *What do I intend to do? The moment Banagher closed his eyes and asked himself this, the door that was nearly shut seemed to clamp something.*

Alberto, who was in the normal suit, appeared on the other side of the elevator door that was opened. He put his hand on the door, let his stout body slip in, and chuckled at the frowning Banagher.

"Hold on a moment. I remember you're called Banagher, right kid?"

The face with the helmet on closed in as the door shut. Banagher clenched his sweaty fists.

## Part 10

The Nahel Argama fired in all directions, raining an endless torrent of large flashing sparks. The debris that touched the explosive lights let out a chain of explosions, leaving a feast of light in the shoal space region.

The red mobile suit—the Sinanju got between this feast as it continued its attacks on the white ship. The orange fireballs flared as the Nahel Argama's fire weakened slightly. Riddhe saw that the red enemy suit appeared whenever there was reflected light from the explosions. It would disappear instantly after appearing, and the thruster jets left a trail of light in space.

"You! If you weren't…!"

Riddhe let his own mobile suit that lost a leg transform into the Wave Rider mode and stepped on the pedal. The G-force from the acceleration struck his body, and the tiny debris that struck the mobile suit let out unpleasant noises. It would be over if Riddhe slammed into a larger debris, but he did not care as he continued to fire the beam rifle hidden inside the shield. "BACK OFF!" Riddhe yelled.

"IF YOU WEREN'T HERE, WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO CARRY OUT SUCH A DISGUSTING BATTLE. SOMETHING LIKE THIS, SOMETHING…!"

The "Sinanju" flew from one piece of debris to another, seemingly mocking the trail of fire that rained on it as it dodged. *Using Mineva Zabi—the girl who was simply Audrey to him is basically what a bad guy will do! Who cares about whether she's the last heir of the Zabi family? What about us who confronts terrorists with hostages?*

"SO WHAT ABOUT THE BOX! BECAUSE OF THIS STUPID THING, EVERYONE…!"

The suit transformed back into the mobile suit form and fired the 60mm Vulcan cannons on its head. Riddhe aimed for the red mobile suit that was flying side to side amongst the debris, and let the "ReZEL" fly further forward. *Damn it, I got all too excited.* His excited brain thought as he raised the beam rifle that had only enough power to last for a few more seconds. At the moment the countdown reached zero, the "Sinanju" spined around to dodge, turned back, and raised its beam rifle to shoot at Riddhe.

*There's no time to dodge. I got too close. I'll get massacred.* Riddhe clicked his tongue as he saw a passing beam graze by the "Sinanju " horizontally, messing its flight path.

Riddhe immediately took action to retreat as he let his mobile suit leap aside. Then, Norm's unit closed in with the beam as it charged towards the "Sinanju", and Riddhe felt that his heating body cooled down a little.

(Calm down, Ensign Riddhe! Stay in order!)

Norm's voice echoed through the wireless speaker as he drew the beam saber and attacked the "Sinanju". The "Sinanju" too drew its beam saber as both sides had an intense clash of blades, giving off sparks in the vacuum.

(It's about time for me, but you're different. You better live even if you have to bite on stone. You still have something you have to do…)

The high-heat particles let out 2, 3 flashes of light, showing both units clashing with each other. There was no room to intervene, and his beam rifle was still charging. (Don't mind me, just shoot!) Flustered, Riddhe heard Norm growl.

(If you don't want your comrades' sacrifices to be in vain, you have to…)

The sudden static covered up the words that followed. A ball of explosion appeared in front, and the "Sinanju", which stood in the light like it was bathed in blood, appeared on the monitor. (Squad

leader Norm…!) Riddhe called out as his mind went blank, and for the time being, he could not move his body. The broken arm from Norm's unit was sent flying over, grazing Riddhe's unit, and the wide-opened hand robbed Riddhe of the deepest part of his soul. The monoeye of the "Sinanju" flickered rudely, seemingly pitying the enemy suit that was injured.

"You bastard…!"

Riddhe squeezed out the remaining ounce of strength he had to force back the pressuring feeling from the red death good. *I'm a pilot. If I have something I have to do right now, it'll be to sink this enemy mobile suit in front of me.* Riddhe ignored the words Norm left in his heart as he put his fingers on the trigger of the beam rifle . The siren indicating that the charge ended seemed to ring coincidentally.

The "Sinanju", with its flickering eye, rushed through the black clouds that showed the remains of Norm's suit, and got under the machine. Riddhe pretended to lose sight of the enemy as he waited for it to close it. *It's not like that guy's beam rifle has infinite ammo. If there's a need for it to make sure that the Nahel Argama can't fight back, it'll definitely get as close as possible to let out a fatal damage. This will be decided within a range of 20km. I'll be happy if I can take revenge here, even if it means dying together*.

The distance between them was shortened, and Riddhe caught sight of the enemy mobile suit through the sensor image and switched the position of his unit the moment the enemy went past 20km. The "ReZEL" used its balance verniers on its entire body, turned 90 degrees back and faced the "Sinanju" head on…it may

look this case, but the machine itself could not maintain its anticipated angle as it tilt to the left like it was tugged aside.

The loss of the right leg caused the AMBAC function to err. It was too late by the time Riddhe realized this, and the enemy mobile suit that it once caught sight of went slightly aside. Riddhe immediately stepped on the pedal, but he knew that it was too late . *I'll be hit, the direct hit would be arriving; I'll not be able to repay anyone's expectations. I will die like a target.* These thoughts of fantasia appeared in his mind, and as the fingers holding the control stick stiffened, Riddhe detected 'that wave' which blew through the inside of the cockpit.

The red enemy suit suddenly changed its course and left the path of contact with the ReZEL. *Did that guy detect it too?* Riddhe immediately took avoid to dodge as he got goosebumps trying to find the source of the wave on the all-view monitor. The wave expanded through the vacuum like a heart pulsating in cadence. He felt this feeling during the battle the day before. This time, it came from the white mothership that was floating amongst the sea of debris.

Riddhe let his cursor point at the Nahel Argama that was firing and enlarged the image. On the middle of the ship that lost its portside catapult deck, the first catapult deck that formed the bow opened its hatch as a mobile suit was sent there. It had white armor like the ship, had a human-shaped build and a lone horn on its forehead—

"It's the Gundam…!?"

The dual eye sensor inside the visor flickered as if in response to Riddhe's inadvertent musing. The white mobile suit was wielding a beam rifle and a shield on its arms, giving off a devilish presence as it stood on the catapult deck of the Nahel Argama.

## Part 11

"It's the first catapult. The Gundam…!

One line from the operator caused everyone on the bridge to look at the communication console. Audrey—Mineva Lao Zabi heard her heart pump as she stared at the side monitor too.

Multiple surveillance cameras installed inside and outside the catapult deck caught sight of the "Unicorn" as the images were shown on the multi-screen. The right hand was wielding a beam rifle loaded with a reloadable pack of 5 rapid-fire rounds, and the left hand was wielding a shield that was as white as the unit itself. The white unit looked like a carrier as it waited for the moment to launch. "SOMEONE TELL THE ONE PILOTING IT TO STOP!" Mineva ignored Captain Otto's roar as she stared at the "Unicorn" which had reloaded completely. *There's only one person who can use that machine. What does he plan to do—*

Daguza forgot that he had his gun pointed at Mineva as he got engrossed looking at the screen. "Gundam, may I know who the pilot is? The captain hasn't given the order to launch. Please return !" The communication operator repeated, but the "Unicorn" showed no signs of returning. *Did he cut the line, or does he not know how to use it?* Mineva deduced that it was most likely the latter as she looked for the man called Alberto on the bridge.

He, who seemed to be one from Anaheim Electronics, knew that the "Unicorn" was the key to the Laplace Box. If it were that man, he would know how to control the machine from the outside. Mineva looked around the bridge, and amongst the many people dressed in normal suits and working, there was not sight of Alberto himself. At her wits' end, Mineva looked back at the screen. The door to the corridor opened after that, and she saw Alberto floating in.

At this moment, Mineva realized something. Daguza, who seemed to realize the exact same thing as he launched himself at Alberto who intended to move towards the commander seat while pretending not to know anything. He merely pretended with a defensive stance before giving a shameless look at Daguza. Mineva saw this and believed that her instincts were right.

"You bastard…! Did you let the boy get on it?"

Daguza said while grabbing the other party's normal suit by the collar. Captain Otto and the rest were shocked as they looked back, and Mineva gave a probing look there. Alberto sneered as he answered unabashedly, "I merely answered everyone's request."

"I equipped him with everything. The RX-0's capabilities are guaranteed. Even an amateur pilot can buy us enough time to escape."

"This is basically handing the Box over to Neo Zeon, and you dared to say that it was merely a key to the Box itself."

Alberto suppressed Daguza's rare emotional voice as he continued, "If the key is spoilt, the Box won't be opened, and the Federation's interests are protected. I don't suppose you have any disagreements, do you?"

The anxiety depressed his blood as his heart pumped loudly again. "You bastard…you already calculated the outcome…" Daguza pushed aside Alberto, turned his back on him and mused, while Mineva stared at the side monitor that showed the "Unicorn ".

"There's no need to worry. Young Banagher will fight well. Until the RX-0 is wrecked, that is."

Alberto said as he floated due to inertia and his back hit the wall. He—Banagher, who did not respond to the operator's call, was waiting to launch inside the "Unicorn"s cockpit, and did not know that this plan was underway. He did not know that he was sent onto the "Unicorn" to be destroyed with the secret of the "box ". Perhaps that was the karma that came with all who inherited the blood of the Vist family? Maybe so. However, he did not do this because he was being bound by shackles or duty. Banagher was simply being driven by a powerful impulse, passion as he sat in the "Unicorn"s cockpit.

He would be leaving just like this. The owner of the skin that touched her hand was going on a path of no return. Mineva realized this as she reached her hand out of the console, seemingly trying to shake aside the operator as she was driven by swelling

emotions she had not imagined. Everything she had abided by up till this point collapsed, and Mineva realized that she would expose her own fear as she yelled.

"BANAGHER, STOP…!"

## Part 12

The pilot suit that was developed for the "Unicorn"s use was not inferior in any ways to an ordinary pilot suit. It could be said to be a more customized version. Unlike normal suits, it had 5 layers of mixed fabrics containing fiberglass and flexible plastics, successfully forming a streamlined body-shape. Also, there was a protective armored vest on the inside that was equipped with an installation to withstand G-forces and life support systems. There were many tubes inside this armor connecting the elbows and arms to the Anti-G force installation, but would not affect the appearance of the suit itself as the tubes were all parsed inside. The suit itself was white to match the "Unicorn"s color, and the red lines of it made it look smart. The chest had a Unicorn on it, the logo representing the Vist Foundation, and the simple design gave it a tone that was not too cumbersome.

(That pilot suit itself has a system that can reduce the stress from the G-force through drugs. Logically, it will be activated when the NT-D is activated. It is injected through painless osmotic pressure, there will be some psyche when it is activated.)

Alberto's subordinate—who called himself a secretary, but was obviously trained in such matters—remained at the takeoff-and-landing command zone as he spoke through the

wireless communicator. Banagher felt a chill when he heard the terms drugs and injections and the like, and asked, “The NT-D?”

(That will refer to the state when the RX-0 removes its limiters. It can’t be activated randomly, but you once activated it, so it’s fine .)

The man’s voice sounded like it was consoling Banagher. Under Alberto’s arrangements, Banagher put on the pilot suit and sat inside the cockpit of the “Unicorn”. He thought of how he was being nudged in the back by such voices. *Basically, I’m being used as a nice meat shield, but fine. It’s good if I can force that red mobile suit to retreat and retreat when I find the opportunity.* Banagher’s rationality over whether he could be able to do such a thing was reduced halfway as he saw the numerous explosions appearing on the all-view monitor. The thin layer of space was replicated using CG like a game image—

Suddenly, a point in the middle of space gathered sharply, causing Banagher to feel goosebumps on his back. *I can’t stay here. I ’ll be targeted.* Banagher finished the safety checks done for the mini-mobile suit and held onto the control seats on the sides of the linear seat, declaring to the wireless communicator: “Launching checks, done.” There was no answer, and the catapult showed no signs of initiating a countdown as the operator’s voice that was trying to stop him rang from the bridge public channel. The Captain and the rest may had realized what was going on as the catapult control was switched to the bridge.

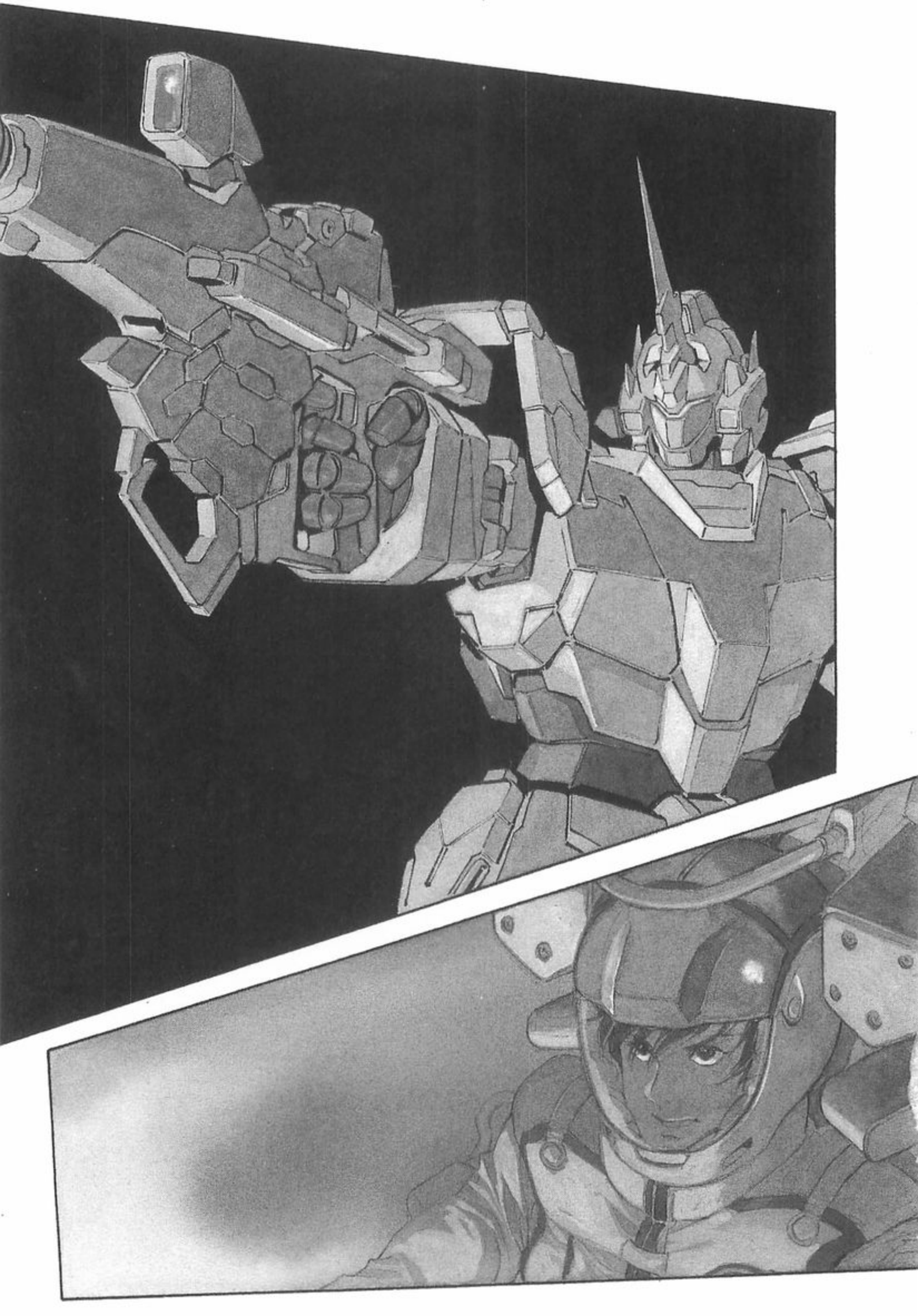
Something gathering in the middle of space gathered its intensity. Banagher stared at the catapult that showed no

movements through the monitor, and turned his eyes to the front, exerting all his trength into his abdomen. “Forced release!” He called out, removed the linkage with the catapult, and stepped on the pedal.

The hooks on the heels were released, and the machine of the “ Unicorn” gently left the deck. The beam that flew over destroyed the catapult, and the light and shockwave exploded right below the feet. Banagher left the Nahel Argama far below him, and then turned his stare at where the beam came from as the beam rifle in his right hand started aiming.

Banagher switched on the aiming screen, which automatically caught sight of the red mobile suit flying amidst the debris. “I see it!” He felt his head burning as he hooked the finger on the trigger in a dream-like state.

“GO!”



The mechanical hand of the “Unicorn” wielding the linked joystick squeezed the trigger of the beam rifle. At that moment, the light-filter could not hold in the large expansion of light as the large energy rocked the frame of the “Unicorn”. The empty chamber slid out of the E-pack, and a new pack was reloaded.

The beam that was a lot thicker than the enemy shots raced through the debris, hitting the 30m thick rock. The rock immediately exploded with the heat, forming countless rays of light in the middle of vacuum. The vortex of light let out a shockwave, and the enemy unit behind the rock got caught in this. The pilot of the enemy suit “Sinanju” seemed to hesitate due to the unexpected power as he hurriedly regrouped. The explosion shone on the red armor as the unit evaded.

“Amazing…!”

The “Unicorn” used up 4 shots worth of energy at one go, and the power was enough to be considered a beam magnum. Banagher was stunned by this overwhelming power. *Am I able to do this?* This thought only appeared in his mind at this moment, causing him to swallow his saliva.

## Part 13

If a normal beam was a ‘trail’, that thing would be called a ‘ fireball’. If it were the main cannon of an enemy warship…the position itself would not be right. One would think that a new mobile suit was launched and shot it.

"What is that…!?"

A chill rose up his body. The battlefield that was dyed by Full Frontal was being invaded by something else. Angelo inadvertently put on his helmet, and that abnormal' fireball went by 5km, causing a chill in him. It was not just a beam launcher. The mega-particle cannon that would match a ship's main cannon flashed in the middle of the vacuum. The second and 3rd fireball that were shot missed quite a bit, but the overwhelming power of caused the debris that acted as shields to explode, and the "Sinanju " looked like it was trying its best just to dodge.

"Is it a mega-bazooka launcher? But this speed…"

The mega-bazooka launcher, the weapon described as having the most firepower amongst mobile suit weapons, would require lots of time to charge the beam launcher, and had the fatal flaw of being unable to be shot consecutively. *This weapon however has equal destructive power, the speed of a beam rifle, and it also has the range that won't lose to a launcher. What is it?* Angelo muttered as he grabbed onto the ball-shaped joystick, and saw the large energy move past him was close range.

That energy that was a mere stray bullet grazed past Ensign Sergi's "Geara Zulu". If it were a beam rifle shot, this would only cause a light burn at such a distance, but the high-energy particle cannon that came over like a fireball melted the machine's armor, and in mere seconds, Sergi was collapsed within a pile of scrap. The shockwave that grazed past continued, and the machine got bent in half at the waist, snapping into halves and floating in space for a short while.

There was no time to even call out through the communicator. " What…!?" Sergi's machine that was divided in half exploded right in front of the speechless Angelo. Suddenly, static could be heard from the wireless communicator, and the shockwave that spread through space caused the pilot to let out a deep sound.

"A LITTLE GRAZE DESTROYED IT!? THAT WAS…!!"

Angelo turned away from the expanding explosion and looked at the battlefield. An umpteenth flash that shook the vacuum hit the debris that would be viewed as the debris of a colony. The " Sinanju" braked suddenly as the exploding debris got in its way, only for the enemy mobile suit to get behind it. Angelo could only see a rough CG visual, but that white machine would definitely be the Gundam—the mobile suit that even Marida Cruz was forced to retreat from, the one that inherited the name of the devil from the Federation. Angelo pushed the trigger of the beam launcher to the maximum before that overly powerful beam was shot over.

The beam that was shot out from the muzzle lit the purple armor, flying right at the white mobile suit. This was not something that was done after consideration. The Gundam hurriedly flew away to dodge, and the "Sinanju" managed to regroup, intending to go underneath to attack. Lieutenant Cuarón seemed to have started shooting covering fire, but Angelo did not actually see for real. *I squeezed the trigger, I stained Captain Frontal's battlefield.* Angelo felt black remorse and rage enter his blank white mind, and felt the fingertips that were clenched trembling.

Trust and loyalty. The clear banner that he bore for himself was stained by this decisive attack. No matter how much he tried to wash it, he would not be able to buy a new one to replace it. Angelo, understood that he had already lost a world in the sense that it could not be back to before.

The exalted utopia where he did not and would not have to pull the trigger did not exist anymore. *That white mobile suit destroyed this world—and stained me like filth that robbed my world before.*

"You forced me…to shoot!?"

Angelo squeezed the trigger while losing himself, sniping at the white mobile suit that was dodging. *If I'm stained, there's no need to hold back. I must shoot it down—no matter the means.* The enemy suit continued to zig-zag its way to escape, and Angelo squeezed the trigger mechanically. *You better be stained by these hands!*

## Part 14

The mega-particle shots flew over at sub-light speed, but they would not be able to hit an object moving at several kilometers every second easily. The scary thing was that when the machine flew at the same level as the enemy—the unexpected snipe would either come from the front or the back.

Thus, he had to zig-zag around. If he moved in the same direction for more than 5 seconds, it would be the same as stopping. This was an actual state in space battles. The snipers knew that when they had allies, one machine would pursue the

enemy to try and lure him into the range of the other unit. At this point, Banagher was facing such a situation. He had been focusing on the red enemy unit's movements and chasing after it, and nearly lost his legs to the beams that came flying in from afar.

"2 vs 1…no, 3 vs 1, huh?"

Banagher mused as he felt a chill from the beam that grazed his head. There were the red enemy suit and the 2 enemy suits supporting from afar, and once he got baited by the red guy, the intersecting beams that crossed the 3 dimensional plane would fly over. He could not let himself get hit.

"Calm down, Banagher. You may not remember, but you should have received training in this. that man trained you…"

Banagher's temples pulsed. His head that had a band tied on it gathered its concentration on the target. The machine continued to move around, and Banagher pulled out the spare magazine that was mounted on the "Unicorn"s waist to reload it into the empty beam rifle. 1 magazine had 5 shots, and including the spare shots, he had another 10 rounds—Banagher vaguely remembered that there were no limit in the ammo count during training.

*I can't waste bullets like this.* Banagher continued to pursue the thruster jets flares of the red enemy suit through the all-view monitor. The killing intent continued to pressure from all directions, coldly stimulating the skin that was drenched in sweat. *A beam may fly from somewhere now and burn the cockpit. Don't miss sight of them. Got to hang on. Don't get forced back, be the one pressuring.*

One hit, two hits. The "Unicorn"s beam rifle let out shots, and the hot magnum rounds were ejected from the cartridge. The thick and large beams merely shone for a while as small debris were evaporated on the path, creating rings of light. This scene of a massacre made the light filter pretty useless as Banagher had his face staring right at the monitor dyed in white. The red enemy suit quickly turned around, and the alarm indicating a lost signal rang through the cockpit.

Neither the object sensor nor the heat sensor showed any response. Banagher felt sweltering sweat as he turned his eyes around. He could receive the radar signal from the Nahel Argama and the remaining machine on their side, but he could not find the enemy's response. Countless debris floated around, and the object sensor was showing a complete blank. *Are the heat sources mixed in the enemy or the exploded hot metal bits—*

"Damn it, I can't touch him like this…!"

The red enemy unit had not fired a single round as it continued to merely lure Banagher into its allies' range. Both sides had not stepped on the same battleground as Banagher anxiously shot the 3rd round, turn the machine around, and saw a savage light explode at the back.

The entire body of the "Unicorn" was lit by the mega-particle that grazed by, and the horizontal G-force tugged at the unit through the impact. The beam grazed by, and the remaining particles that hit the armor let out knocking sounds that were like small stones hitting it. Banagher felt intense pressure from the legs.

The airbag that was installed on the pilot seat expanded, preventing the pilot's blood from rushing to the legs. At that moment, the enemy could be spotted amongst the just dimmed view, and Banagher frantically held onto the control stick that was nearly let go.

*The next direct hit will come.* Banagher instinctively realized as he stepped on the pedal, moving the machine around as he fired the beam magnum. The large light ripped through vacuum, and the red enemy that had been evading agilely appeared amongst the debris.

"That was close…!"

The skin let out a clattering sound as goosebumps rose. Banagher unwittingly squeezed the trigger, and he felt the last magnum shot fly out. The red enemy dodged the beam attack and closed in on the "Unicorn" without slowing down. *He's coming right at me.* As Banagher thought about this, another person's breathing could be heard from the communicator. (As long as I don't get hit…) The sharp voice said this as it rang in Banagher's ears.

(This will be nothing!)

The monoeye of the red enemy shone, and the blade of the beam saber swept up from the feet. Banagher screamed out as he pulled the control stick. He was originally unable to make it, but the "Unicorn" was faster by a beat or so, causing the thrusters on

the back and legs to flare up and leave the danger area directly. The red machine's beam saber swung through the space at the last moment, leaving behind a trail of yellow light.

The Intention Automatic System could allow the "Unicorn"s psycommu installation to pick up the pilot's thought waves, allowing the machine's skeleton—the full psycommu body to be able to react at the same time and operate. Banagher remembered the explanation Alberto gave when he was hurrying down, "There 's no need to control it. Is this it…?" Banagher muttered to himself, and widened his eyes at the evil intent that surged up his spine. *I' m being shot at. I got too careless of that red guy.* Banagher saw that he was moving in a straight line for several seconds undefended, and unwittedly raised the shield in his left hand to the front. The mega-particle bullet then covered the all-view monitor.

He was already ready for a hit, but the beam was deflected right in front of the shield, and a wind-pressure like impact shook the machine before stopping. Yes, the beam bent. The original beam trajectory would have hit the machine directly, but it was like an invisible pressure bent the path of the shot.

(An I-field…!?) The enemy's voice could be heard from the wireless communicator. Banagher looked side to side without knowing what was going on. The shield that was equipped on the left hand changed, and the completely different silhouette on the monitor attracted Banagher's attention. The many layers of heavy armor expanded above and below, and the radial armor had slid aside to show what resembled a flower instead of a shield.

With the round installation that was hidden at the center, the radial-shaped sliding armor opened like blooming petals, forming an invisible field around it. The I-field kept Minovsky Particles compressed and cause the mega-particles to deflect off. This field that was used to control a core reactor deflected the beam trajectory. The shield itself had a device that would create small I-fields and protect it against beam weapons.

The red enemy showed a doubtful action. Banagher checked the machine to see if it took any damage, mused "Is this thing really okay?" and heaved out the breath he held. He reloaded the last magazine before the sweat on his body could even drip down, and aim the reticule at the red unit.

"In that case…!"

Banagher pointed the shield right at the front and fired the beam magnum. He went right at the exploding debris and intended to get right below the enemy unit as he fired two shots. *If I can defend against a beam flying from afar, there's no need to worry about moving around wildly. I can definitely hit him if I can calm down and shoot.* The third flare lit the red enemy armor. *Once more-this call echoed within Banagher's agitated mind, and the 4th shot was released when the red enemy stopped.*

The exploded ball of light expanded, and the debris appeared on the monitor in black trails. *Did I get him?* Banagher bent forward, only to feel a chill to a chill from the siren that rang inside the cockpit. It was the approaching siren—coming from below. It was too late by the time he realized it, and the red mobile suit's

monoeye suddenly appeared on the monitor as the leg kicked the abdomen of the "Unicorn".

The tough 20 ton block of metal caused the machine to experience a destructive amount of recoil due to the mass and the velocity of the impact. The "Unicorn" was sent flying back as the powerful G-force rocked Banagher from behind. The attachments at the back let out a clattering sound, and the air barrier that shot out of the display board formed an invisible cushion. The helmet that hit the board did not crack apart because this layer of air barrier lessened the impact, but was unable to nullify this bone-crushing impact completely. *I definitely thought that I got rid of the enemy, so why? Did he predict my fire and let a missile he has explode ?* His mind that was experiencing the pull of the powerful G force was having these thoughts that faded. *I can't match this enemy. This conclusion and fear appeared at the same time.* The capability of the mobile suit isn't even half the factor determining the win. The pilot 's abilities are based on experience, talent, and—

Suddenly, a shocking impact could be felt from behind, dispersing all doubt. This G-force struck from the front, and Banagher was pushed back onto the linear seat, only to feel an icy cold liquid flow out of his nose. The "Unicorn" that was sent flying slammed hard into a stone tablet 50m in diameter.

*This is definitely not a coincidence. The enemy definitely predicted the flow of the debris and planned to let me hit this stone block, and it's obvious from how it continued to close in on me.* Banagher caught sight of the monoeye amidst his blurry vision, and subconsciously raised his rifle. He saw the last magnum round let out a torrent of bullets, and blankly squeezed the trigger while the enemy unit

with considerable mobility continued dodging as the alarm rang. Everything and anything seemed to be covered by a translucent field as the sense of realism gradually faded. Banagher thought, *Will I die like this?* as the bones and flesh clattered.

*I couldn't do anything at all. The Nahel Argama hasn't left the radar range, I haven't damaged the red enemy by the slightest. I couldn't save Audrey, I can't repay the expectations dad gave me when he handed me this machine* —the enemy mobile suit in front let out a gust of killing intent, and as the hair rose from the scalp, Banagher realized that it was the 'heat' burning within his body.

This 'heat' started when he ignored the silent adults and boarded the "Unicorn"…no, it existed even before that, when he met Audrey for the first time, this 'heat' that was born when he was walking with her still pulsed within this body. Banagher knew that this 'heat' was letting blood flow through his fearful body and soul, gushing out from his pores. *That's not all. There's definitely something else I can do.* This 'heat' continued to say this to him as a small glow exploded through his forehead.

Banagher visualized this burning sensation piercing through the psycommu that formed the frame and gathered on the " Unicorn"s lone horn. The horn split in halves like lightning-chopped wood, forming a V shape, and the units on both sides of the head turned half a round. The beam sabers handles that were on the back poked out, and the dual eye sensors hidden under the face mask flashed like a human blink, and the gaps that were formed by the armor bits that slid off gave a red glow.

The wrists and the feet felt a heavy impact as the monitor of the circular device installed at the arms of the pilot seat was activated. The display board showed the words 'NT-D', and the condition monitor changed gradually while the full psycommu that was like an exoskeleton expanded as several parts of the armor slid aside. It was the "Unicorn" that was larger than before—the white mobile suit that did not fit its name at this point. The 'transformation' that happened in milliseconds happened, and the exposed thrusters that were on the back and legs became really hot as the machine automatic activated its mobility to leave the debris field. The red enemy's beam saber stabbed into the surface of the rock, causing the dust to explode out.

This instantaneous explosiveness, acceleration and maneuverability were different from the controls before. The red enemy immediately turned around and quickly left the scene. The "Unicorn" did not let go of the enemy's movements as it burned its thrusters and immediately got behind the enemy. Banagher was shaken by the fatal G-force, and despite fulling that his body was being crushed by some heavy fluid, he continued to follow the enemy that zigzagged its way out. The enemy he could nota approach before could be seen easily at this point. Banagher's consciousness was on the same wavelength as the machine as he knew that his consciousness was all over it.

"This is the Gundam…!?"

His hear pounded wildly like a morning bell, and the body that was forced down the linear seat felt very hot. The attachments on the headrest forced the helmet down, and he could not turn his

head around. However, it was not inconvenient to control it as the V-shaped multiblade antenna of the "Unicorn Gundam" let out a golden glow reflecting how Banagher was consciously turning his head to think and predict as it caught sight of the enemy unit right in front of it. The thruster jets of the red enemy flared in intervals as it got between the debris. It was fast—but the trajectories were predictable.

"I can see it…!"

Banagher brushed aside the air that felt somewhat sticky as he held onto the joystick. The beating in his heart was faster, and his body heated up like it was about to explode. *Too slow.* Banagher was aware for this, but the "Unicorn Gundam" that predicted this a second earlier let out a burst of Vulcan cannons from the fixed armament without the pilot's input. The tracer shots that took up 1 out of 5 shots let out trails of light, and the visible-laser like fire charged right at the enemy.

The red enemy turned its body to evade. Once it predicted the where the thruster jets would be from the enemy's posture, the Gundam fired out a flare that reached that place first. The shockwave of the shot rocked the cockpit (Oh…?) Banagher heard this sigh through the wireless communicator, and felt a chill from the enemy's voice that had fear and delight, feeling that this was the time he would get serious. The enemy suit that suddenly flipped kicked the debris nearby.

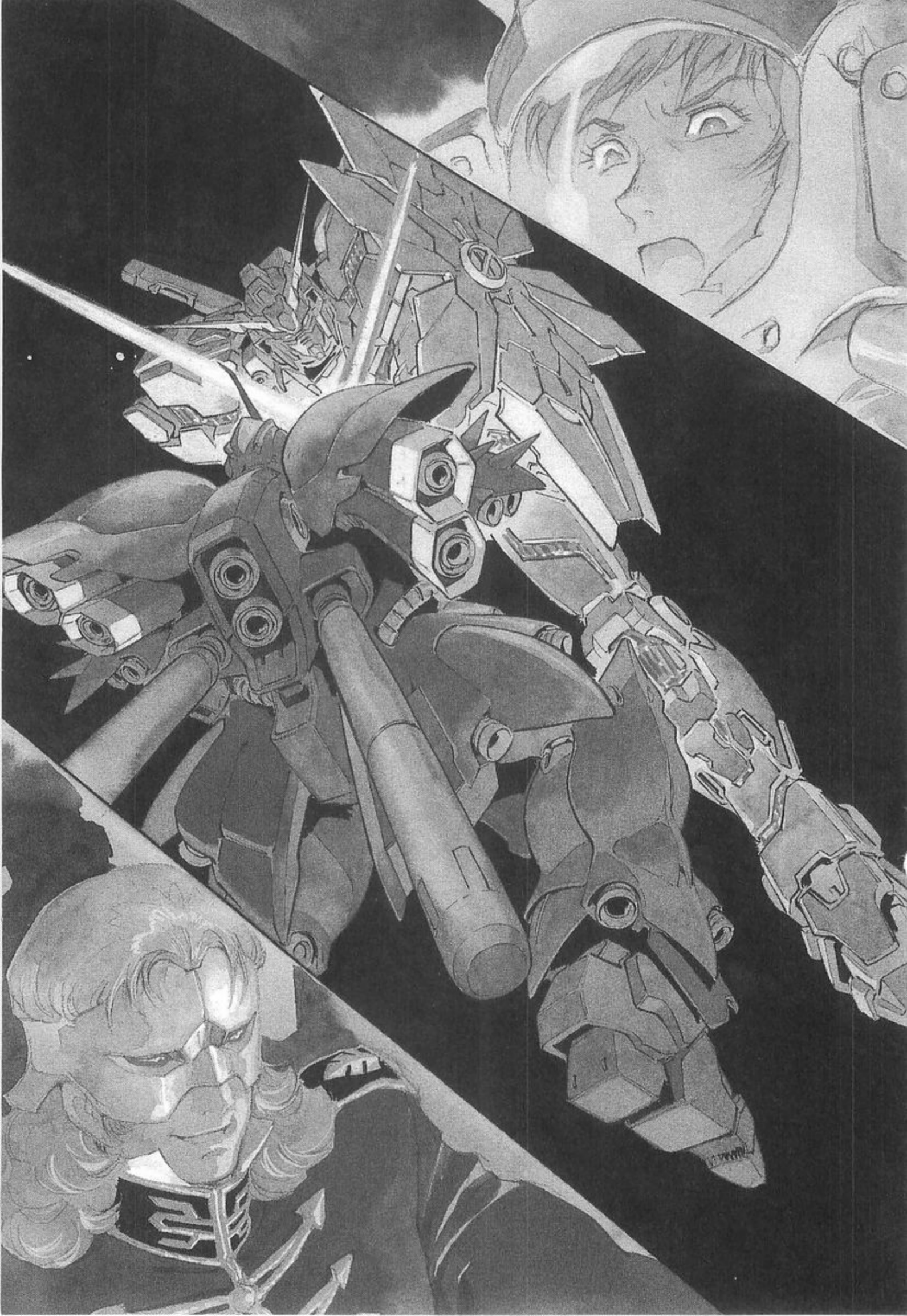
The enemy unit flew right at Banagher by using the recoil from the kick to spin its body. *He's below me.* As Banagher thought this way, the upswinging beam saber appeared in his sights. While the

body was unable to move, the acutely aware consciousness deep within took action on its own. The Gundam reacted earlier and drew a beam saber. The beam particles from both sides clashed, and a glow brighter than an explosion expanded through the sea of debris.

(You're going to be my enemy again, Gundam…!?)

*Die he open the communication channel?* The enemy's voice rang clearly in Banagher's ears. He had no time to think as he shouted, " Please retreat!"

"If you don't retreat, Audrey will…!"



The beam sabers that were clashed with each other bounced off, and the two units pulled their distance while the remaining particles were scattered like fireworks. Banagher immediately regrouped as he saw the red enemy unit on the monitor before aiming at it, only to be shocked by another voice (I'll flank him. Rise up quickly!)

Banagher immediately went up, and a beam that felt in from a corner grazed past the enemy unit. The enemy unit managed to dodge the attack at the last minute, only to be stumbled by the huge particle beams that were shot over, leaving the machine undefended right in front of Banagher. *A good chance!* His thoughts shouted as he let the Vulcan cannons fire over, letting two trails of fire fly right at the enemy unit.

The ally transformable mobile suit continued to fire the beam rifle docked on the shield at the bottom of the machine as it closed in. The silhouette that was in fighter jet form went below Banagher , immediately transformed into a mobile suit, and the unit that lost a leg got right below the enemy. He might look rather anxious at this point, but that mobility was something to behold. "That's Ensign Riddhe, right?" Banagher muttered for a short moment as he changed the direction the "Unicorn" was heading based on the ally machine's movements. Both machines fire intersected each other, forming a large and long beam cross in the vacuum.

Their consciousnesses were connected with each other as Banagher felt that he was forcing back the red enemy unit. The red enemy fell back, and the intersection point of the beam was moving onto the unit, looking like it was sucking in the unit. The

debris that got involved in the beam exploded, and as the enemy unit intended to dodge the flying debris, Banagher saw the red armor take a direct hit with a glow as it exploded.

"Did I get him?"

This time, he did not make a mistake. The enemy unit took a hit on the hell, and looked like it was turning around. The thruster jet that stopped glowed, and the machine tried to escape while abandoning the thruster unit on the back/ Banagher was numbed by the excited heart and controlled by the burning sensation of blood rushing up his brain as he chased after the enemy unit showing its back.

The "Unicorn" charged forward recklessly while dragging a trail of red luminous light. It used its shields to block the enemies' long-ranged attacks, got past the relatively large debris, and could see the silhouette of the red enemy. (Don't go too far in!) Ensign Riddhe's voice rang from the wireless communicator, but it did not matter. Banagher let the left mechanical hand wield the trembling beam saber, and stepped on the pedal as much as possible.

The hand movements were synchronized with the psycommu, and the Gundam immediately accelerated as it charged right at the red enemy. The airbag equipped inside the cockpit expanded, surrounding the entire body tightly like it was about to explode. *My heart's going to break, I can't breathe.* The circular device at the wrist flickered, and the warning sign appeared on the display board. The enemy unit was right in front of it. Everything was dyed red, and the vision that was narrowed quickly was dyed in

the color of blood. Banagher did not bother with thinking about why this would be the case as he moved the aiming reticule of the beam saber over the sight of the enemy unit he capture. The red enemy suddenly turned around with its monoeye staring at Banagher, and at this moment—

(How naïve.)

The enemy's voice rang from the wireless communicator, cooling the nerves that were excited. Numerous beams then came flying in from a completely different direction, and the exploding sparks appeared between the Gundam and the enemy.

These were not beams that were support fire from afar, but attacks that came from an extremely close range. Banagher instinctively raised his shield to let the machine retreat, and Riddhe called out (Behind you!), causing his numb fingertips to tremble.

The "Unicorn"s psycommu read that Banagher intended to look back as its head unit quickly turned around. The weirdly-shaped mobile expanded its 4 pods like wings as it appeared right in front of him. Banagher felt his mind turn blank.

*The 4-winged that attacked "Industrial 7"—where did it come from?* The consciousness that was attracted by the red enemy suit returned back to its body, and it was too late by the time he grabbed onto the joystick. The large unit with 4 wings covered the all-view monitor as its support arms that were like insects grabbed the "Unicorn"s body.

The left arm, right shoulder and head were pinched, and the impact reached the cockpit that had the warning lights flickering. One of the pods was still damaged, and the hidden arm was melted off with the front part. He saw that it was that 4-winged machine, which then clenched its right mechanical hand as a fist and slammed it into the Gundam's abdomen.

This punch splendidly hit the body as if it was swung by a person himself. The impact that was several tons heavy erupted through a layer of armor. The monitor suddenly flickered abruptly , but the Unicorn could not be blown behind since it was grabbed by the 3 hidden arms. The impact that could not be reduced rocked the machine, and the force of the hit charged right at the cockpit, causing the weakest point of the unit—Banagher's body to short-circuit.

The loud sound of metal clashing with each other rang, and the abruptly expanding air struck Banagher. The linear seat let out a creaking sound together with its support, the heart that felt like it pounded suddenly gradually calmed down as the white sparks appeared right in front of him. The vomit that came out from the mouth dirtied the visor, and all Banagher could see was the monoeye of the 4-winged becoming rather blurry as his vision gradually faded.

The body that was extremely tense collapsed together with the mind, and the machine's nerves were the only thing supporting the frame of the Gundam. The 'heat' was swallowed by the icy cold darkness. *I'm sorry, Audrey.* As the giant gradually transformed into the "Unicorn", Banagher's battered body let out this musing in the middle of the giant's abdomen, and the final

part of this 'heat' seeped out in the form of water from the eyes. He could not even look at the red enemy right above him as he lost consciousness.

## Part 15

The luminous light that could be seen from afar faded, and the machine used its 3 support arms under its wings to capture on the Gundam as it stepped on the pedal. The Gundam gradually changed back into the mobile suit with the lone horn. Riddhe saw 4 thruster jets start to flare on the monitor, and stepped on the pedal without even thinking.

"Wait…!"

*The beam launcher has finished charging, but I can't snipe at it as long as the 4-winged's still carrying the Gundam. I can only go close and use the beam rifle equipped under the shield to slow the enemy down, but with the 4-winged allow us to do?* As Riddhe thought about this, countless beams appeared in multiple directions right in front of him, forcing him retreat immediately. They were not beams of support fire from afar, but thinner beams.

Despite these being attacks from close distance, the funnels did not trigger the sensors.

"The funnels…?"

The beams that closed in from all directions appeared on the all-view monitor, and the complex lights lit the cockpit piloting the trembling machine. Riddhe got through the surrounding funnels

that were sent out by the 4-winged, and bit his lips as he could not do anything.

*Everything was planned right from the beginning. That red guy—the "Sinanju" acted as bait, while the lured Gundam used its 4 wingeds to clamp it. That 4-winged hid inside the debris and entered the battlefield while our side was attracted by the opening left by the "Sinanju". They definitely planned using this red guy to show us that he got hit.*

*Is this planned based on the unknown factor over whether the Gundam would launch? I guess so. Those Zeon guys definitely expected that the Gundam would be launched. It's impossible for the Nahel Argama to defend against such an attack with their current fighting strength alone. The previous battle already showed the enemy fully our powerless our side is.*

"Damn it…!"

*They actually looked down on us like that!* Riddhe charged out from the surrounding funnels, and forced his machine to transform. Despite losing a leg, the Waverider form itself would allow them to catch up to the enemy unit. *We can't hand the Gundam, the mobile suit that looks like it had something to do with the Laplace Box, over to those guys.* This thought appeared in his mind, and he did not think after that. He kept waiting for the machine's status to change, but it just would not change no matter how much he waited. What replaced it was an alarm indicating that the machine functions were down. The multiple windows covered the all-view monitor, showing the damaged parts as the warning lights shone through the cockpit.

He could not activate the standby circuits, and the damage control system could not recover. Riddhe tried all means, recognized that his machine had already becomd scrap metal, and groaned, “Damn it!” as he slammed the display board. He saw the light dot of the Gundam being held by the enemy leave the sensor range. The pilot that was inside it was too—

“It’s that brat…why did he…”

Riddhe muttered as he clenched the fists lying on the display board. He knew the answer clearly. *That voice came through the wireless communicator…calling for Audrey. That boy, Banagher the civilian, boarded that Gundam to save her. He was the only one who took action as the adults got more than what they bargained by grabbing a hostage and shot themselves in the foot. He did not care whether she was Mineva Zabi or not.*

*And then, I got saved again. I’m the only one who survived in this space where so many of my comrades died. Live even if I have to bite on stone…what should I do when you say this? How do I pay you back for your deaths?* Riddhe looked around the floating debris and asked this at Norm’s machine that showed no signs of life, standing around without finding any answers. The enemy units were no longer in the sensor range, and Riddhe felt the space with the disappeared explosions cool down silently.

## Part 16

*The unit probably malfunctioned there. That transformable unit with its lost leg has given up on pursuing. There’s no need to shoot it down.*

Marida turned back and deduced this as she ordered the scattered funnels to return. She closed her eyes, imagined the return paths of the funnels, and turned her stare right at the white mobile suit grabbed by the extra arms.

The mobile suit lost its Gundam appearance as an antenna that looked like a lone horn appeared on it. *Looking at these straightforward attack patterns that showed no signs of retreating, it seems that it's the same pilot as the one that pilot this mobile suit the last time. IT's expected that the cornered enemy ship would send out the Gundam, but what's the point of sending the same pilot who's no different from an amateur? Even if this is a very important machine related to the Laplace Box—*

A slight shock shook the cockpit, and Marida stopped what she was thinking. The "Sinanju" flying beside her touched the " Kshatriya"s fingertips with the left hand. (I probably would not get this chance if I didn't show that I got hit…this would be what I want to say, but that's not all.) The calm voice that rang through the wireless communicator echoed in Marida's ears.

(I'll probably would be shot down if you weren't around, Lieutenant. Thank you, Lieutenant Marida Cruz.)

Full Frontal's voice showed some signs of self-depreciation, but despite that, it was rather sincere. As far as Marida knew, his " Sinanju" had never taken a direct hit before. She stared at the red machine that was charred by the burn on the calf in a concerned manner, and deduced that it was not too much of a an issue. "I was just following your plan, Captain." Marida answered without any expression. "More concerning though…" she wanted to

continue (I understand) the other party's voice reached her helmet before she could continue.

(It's unexpected for Her Highness Mienrva to be captured by the enemy ship. I want to save her as fast as possible, but we have to prioritize this unit first.)

"As far as we know, the enemy doesn't have enough forces we know of. If you permit, I can go back to retrieve her on my own."

(It can't be helped. If the Box is taken away, the enemy fleet nearby may show signs of mobilizing. It's not fun to be surrounded by the enemy before we return back to "Palau".)

"But…!"

(There are many chances to save Her Highness, including political means. We shouldn't force ourselves here and lose you and the "Kshatriya" together, Lieutenant. You have to be patient.)

Frontal said as these words seemed like they were telling himself to endure. *Tactically, he's right to say that we had to leave 'her' alone. But is this merely all an act? Basically, we have been assuming that all the actions this masked man of unknown origin did are all an act.* "…Yes." Marida answered as she turned her eyes to look at the monoeye of the "Sinanju". Then, other voices could be heard within the wireless communicator (Captain, good thing you're fine !) as a "Geara Zulu" followed them.

The purple machine that was blazing off its boost port turned itself as it followed the "Sinanju". The "Kshatriya" took the

pressure from the thruster pressure, causing Marida to click her tongue. Angelo would always do this whenever he had a chance, and it looked like he did not care about Marida's existence. She saw the leader of the escort squad circle the "Sinanju" as it first showed its loyalty by checking if the machine was safe. (Is that so? What happened to Ensign Sergi was really unfortunate.) Frontal said with a rising tone.

(I'm sorry. I was right beside him…) Cuarón let out this voice that sounded like he was gritting his teeth as he sharply turned the monoeye over to the Gundam. (So this is that Gundam…) Marida felt goosebumps as she heard that deep voice.

(It's just as the predictions we had from Lieutenant Marida's report. It does look like a rather radical unit. It'll be great if the pilot isn't crushed.)

Frontal said. *This abnormal function that views a pilot's life as secondary can't possibly be maintained for a long time. It's correct to guess that there's a time limit, and we managed to capture it successfully, but we can't guarantee if the pilot could survive until we open the cockpit* . Marida felt annoyed by the heinous stare from Cuarón's unit as she looked for some place to stare into at the wide space behind her.

*The enemy ship's covered with debris; I can't grasp the correct position, and I can't feel any pressure…in that case, is this pilot the one letting out the 'presence' before?* Marida thought about this, felt that it was just an 'artificial being', stopped thinking, and looked back at where the Garencieres was.

*No matter what, Her Highness Mineva is on that ship. I have to get back this symbol of Zeon's revival Zinnerman has been risking his life on protecting no matter what—*

## Part 17

"We lost response. Target left the radar's range."

The sensor operator's report rang painfully. "Understood." Otto answered with an obviously heavy-hearted tone, while Mineva clenched the hands that were on the back rest of the navigation seat.

The machines it was carried were completely wrecked. The ship itself too heavy damage, and the "Unicorn" landed in the hands of the enemy. The current situation was such that there was nothing other than defeat, but the atmosphere that filled the "Nahel Argama" was not of regret over the loss of the battle, but regret and anger over being unable to do anything. *Did we not lose by fighting? Didn't we end up being unable to do anything?* Such a feeling struck everyone's shoulders. Such a self-awareness caused the mouths to become heavy, creating an atmosphere that surrounded the ship, one where everyone did not dare to look at each other straight in the eyes.

That's right, nobody managed to do anything. Including themselves, everyone present did not manage to do anything. They did fight—to survive, to carry out their responsibilities. However, they never got anything. From the beginning till the end

, they were all restrained by their positions, started bluffing, playing pointless tricks, and yet never did anything that was really necessary. In the end, everyone lost something important.

"THIS ISN'T THE TIME TO SAY UNDERSTOOD! CAPTAIN, START SEARCHING FOR THE ENEMY!. THE "UNICORN", THE BOX WAS TAKEN BY NEO ZEON…!"

As everyone remained silent, Alberto was the only one pointing at the space outside the window. He took action through his own way before, and lost the most important thing to him. Before Mineva could even turn around, "It's impossible for us when we don't even have a mobile suit, right?" Otto's deep voice rang throughout the bridge.

"Thanks to you meddling around with your unnecessary stuff, the "Gundam" ended up being taken by the enemy. Shut up."

"What are you saying!? If I didn't do so, this ship might have been sunk by the Red Comet. This is the same as Commander Daguza using a hostage. Didn't you silently agree as well, Captain!?"

The hulking assistant leader was standing beside Daguza, who was giving a stone-like face, and gave a disgruntled look at Alberto. Otto continued to look in front, and even though he was just holding onto the handle of the Captain's seat, the rage that could not be vented elsewhere was different from Daguza's. Alberto got close to him and continued to say in a commanding tone, "If that's the case, we have to hurry up and ask for instructions from the Senate Council."

"Hurry up and get into an area where the laser communicator can be—"

"I told you to shut up."

As he said this, Otto reached his hand for Alberto's helmet. He grabbed the visor and pulled it to him, bringing his face to a distance where their helmets were nearly sticking to each other and said, "Try saying another word if you dare." The emphasized voice that had killing intent in it caused Alberto's pulled body to tremble.

"I'll throw you into space. Together with your subordinates."

After intimidating him with a serious voice, Otto pushed him away. Alberto's body continued to float in zero gravity until First Officer Liam, who was standing behind, grabbed him. Liam gently carried Alberto up until he was able to let his feet touch the floor. Just when he was about to grumble, he was stunned by the woman who was a head taller than him glaring down at him. He timidly looked around the bridge. All of them were responding as such. Alberto, whose soles were magnetized to the floor, started to stagger.

"Looks like your expectations failed you."

Daguza muttered. Alberto could only clench his fists hard and tremble slightly as he did not say anything. Daguza passed by Mineva who was nearby and stood behind her with the usual poker face that had its emotions restrained.

"Pardon my rudeness to you."

He silently spoke up and reached for Mineva's shoulders. However, Mineva turned away before his fingers touched her cape .

The hand that reached out missed, but Daguza did not leave the place. Mineva kicked the floor and let her body float towards the exit of the bridge. The hulking assistant leader followed her from behind, and though Mineva felt that he had the intention of taking over Daguza's duties in escorting her, she had no intention of looking at anyone. Right now, she did not want to see anyone's face, and neither did she want anyone to touch her. Even though the communicator's voices continue to enter, Mineva still felt that the bridge was completely silent. Before she left, she again looked at the universe that was expanded outside the window.

There was a sea of stars filled with silent lights in front of the people who lost their expressions. *Just like that, Full Frontal obtained the key to the 'Box'. In terms of how every person here wasted their efforts , I myself lost a lot too, but is that all?* A large hole was opened in her chest, and Mineva muttered to herself in her heart as she experienced the feeling of loss that felt like her body was going to curl up if she did not tense up. The certain person she did not know how he looked like until yesterday, the one who called her Audrey, the puppy-like straightforward expression of his appeared in her mind as the feeling of the hand that held her hand tightly awoke again. It was not out of duty nor loyalty, but the warm hand of that person who reached out to her…

*Banagher.* The name was called out without avail in her heart, and she sighed. *It is not a loss; it may have become my own burden.* As she randomly thought, Mineva took the lift without waiting for the assistant leader to lead her. No matter where the detention room was, she knew that it was somewhere after taking this lift. *As the person who inherited the Zabi name, I must not let myself be seen being dragged by the arm in such an unkempt manner by the public.*

## Part 18

At that moment, something strange was happening inside the cockpit of the "Unicorn".

The warning lights of the all-view monitor and the display port were turned off, and the display words <La+> appeared again. The power of the monitor was immediately turned off, and the cockpit was covered with real darkness. What replaced it was the visual image of outer space shining vaguely on the linear seat.

The visual that was not processed through CG was similar to what he saw with his naked eyes. The "Kshatriya" that was grappling the machine, the "Sinanju" and the "Geara Zulu" that were probably moving in front were not on the screen. The infinitely deep pitch black space that was painted with silver powder started to spread out, causing the red <La+> that was in the center of the void to look extremely eyecatching. That word that was floating parallel to the linear seat continued to flicker with the coordinate data, seemingly indicating where the "Unicorn" should head to next.

Banagher did not notice the existence of that light. The attachment was loose, and the body that was floating up slightly from the linear seat was not moving at all. The eyes continued to remain shut as the visor of the helmet was the only thing reflecting the light of the stars. The <La+> light flickering behind did not even reach inside the visor. Banagher left aside the lights that caused him to lose control of his fate and many to gradually sink into chaos—indicating the location of the “Laplace Box”, and passed out in a groggy state.